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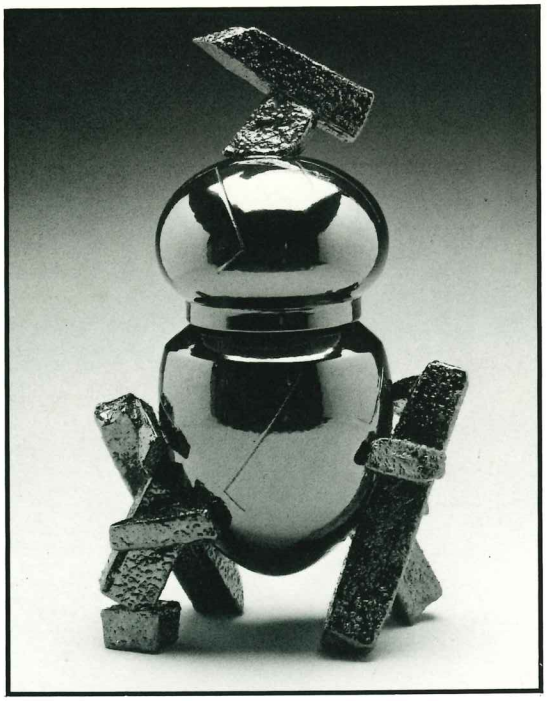

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Rick Hirsch, 1981, Ceremonial Cup No. 9 /raku, 12"h
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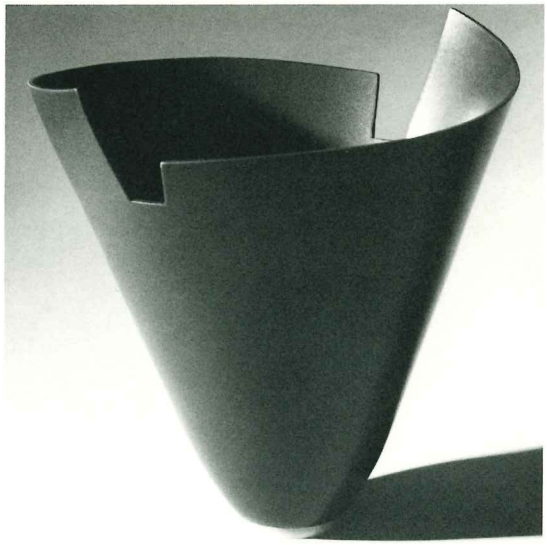

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(Cover) Untitled *(1979), by Graham Marks 31" x 29½" x 32" (79 x 75 x 81 cm), earthenware. Collection Daniel Jacobs and Derek Mason. Photo: John Chang McCurdy.*

Susan Wechsler
The Tripod Vessels of Rick Hirsch
Page 8.

Tony Hepburn
On Taking Risks
The Decline of the Avant-Garde, page 12.

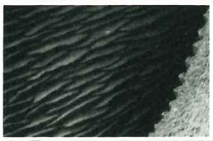
PORTFOLIO

Sarah Bodine
Mocking the Strongman Image
The Vessels of Christopher Gustin, page 16.

Diana L. Johnson
Boobies, Boojums, and Snarks
The Victorian Visions of the Martin Brothers, page 20.

Jack Troy
Jugology
The Neurological Origins of Wheel-Thrown Pottery, page 28.

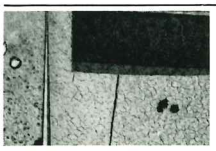
PORTFOLIO



Michael McTwigan
The Fruitful Mysteries of Graham Marks
Page 32.

CHRONICLE

Elaine Levin
Glen Lukens
Pioneer of the Vessel Aesthetic, page 40.



Exhibitions
Begin on page 44.

Books
Begin on page 62.

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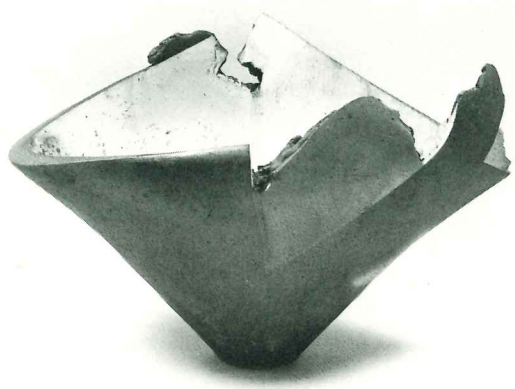

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The Tripod Vessels of Rick Hirsch

Susan Wechsler

Kyoto, Japan, is the home of the raku pottery tradition, as well as of the Raku family itself. When Rick Hirsch arrived there in 1978 to coordinate a raku workshop for the World Crafts Council, he found himself among a huge crowd of people as he stepped down from the train. Raku-san, the fourteenth descendent of Chojiro (the original raku potter and most celebrated tea master), was making a rare public appearance; he was encompassed by television and radio reporters, as well as admirers. At the personal request of the emperor, Raku-san would later give his first and only public demonstration of his family tradition for the conference. Hirsch remembers their meeting:

Hiroaki Morino took me across the street, and there was this little man in a charcoal gray suit with hundreds of people around him. Whenever he spoke, they bowed. We all wore these little identification tags—name, school, city and state—but Raku-san's simply said, "Mr. Raku."

Later Hirsch received a rare invitation to Raku-san's studio, where they shared hours of conversation over tea:

He brought out all the bowls made by every generation of the family: we held them and drank tea from them. They were beautiful products of conscious artist-craftsmen.

The difference between the traditional Japanese concept of raku and its Western interpretation became obvious when Hirsch presented his slide lecture, illustrating the vast scope of American raku. The American point of view, says Hirsch, is totally "out of the context of the traditional ceremonial tea vessel," and the Japanese were very impressed. As Raku-san said to Hirsch, "Raku is changing from a butterfly to a bird."

Hirsch's own determined attempt to extend the definition of raku is representative of the enormous change this genre has undergone in our time. The artist began experimenting with the process in the late sixties, while attending the School for American Craftsmen in Rochester, New York. At the time, he was drawn by the metallic iridescence most often associated with the technique. When he later moved to an isolated area of Canada to teach, Hirsch spent much time alone working, surrounded by the quiet beauty of a rural environment. Integrating available natural materials with his firing process, as well as with his ideas about form, he slowly began to explore the subtle qualities of surface that now characterize his work.

By carefully layering underglazes, metallic chlorides, and more recently, colored terra sigillata and lead glazes, Hirsch achieves remarkably deep colors and rich patinas. The colors break the clay into a variety of planes, creating a surface illusion of many dimensions. Earthlike tones—warm oranges blushed with yellow and gray, coppery reds accentuated by green, and shiny burnt sienna—create a primitive yet formal mood for his elegant forms, while soft carbon marks, fire spots, and oxidized patches of color highlight some areas and delineate edges. These subtle marks, characteristic of raku, also reinforce a sense of mystery and timelessness, concepts important to the artist.

I saw many things in Japan that made me think about the idea of age, and how it adds beauty to things.

In their resemblance to aged metal, the crusty surface and patina on his forms recall bronze kettles from ancient Japanese tea ceremonies—objects which he passionately admires and collects. This sense of the past is further reinforced by the shapes of his pieces, most recently the tripod vessel, a ceramic form familiar to Chinese, pre-Columbian, and other cultures. Hirsch enjoys this historical likeness, but it is important to him that his own forms make a contemporary statement.

The pots look ancient in surface and color, but in terms of form investigation they are fairly futuristic. They reflect past and future, and the way I handle clay . . . I want them to relate to all cultures.

By combining the sleek, sophisticated lines of his forms with a hovering stance, he is able to project the image of futuristic spaceships or dwellings (he calls them *Space Vessels*). In addition, their large scale and exaggerated proportions create tension and ambiguity not found in earlier manifestations of the tripod. For example, one leg may be enlarged, reduced, or altered; this asymmetry articulates a unique outline for the form, often revealing a sensual curve or edge. The scale is also uncommon; some are unusually tall, as much as twenty-four inches, others are low in profile and, unlike most vessels, horizontal in orientation. Certain tripods seem about to fall over, or their legs appear not strong enough to support their weight. The sharply pointed feet also heighten their apparent fragility and precarious stance.

There is another way in which Hirsch circumvents the inherent symmetry of the tripod—by adding actual pieces of driftwood to the clay form. This is tricky business, however. For not only does the introduction of another material strike a somewhat discordant note, but these gnarled, organic objects seem out of harmony with the clean, smooth lines of the tripods themselves. While on occasion the integration is successful, more often the addition of driftwood seems contrived.

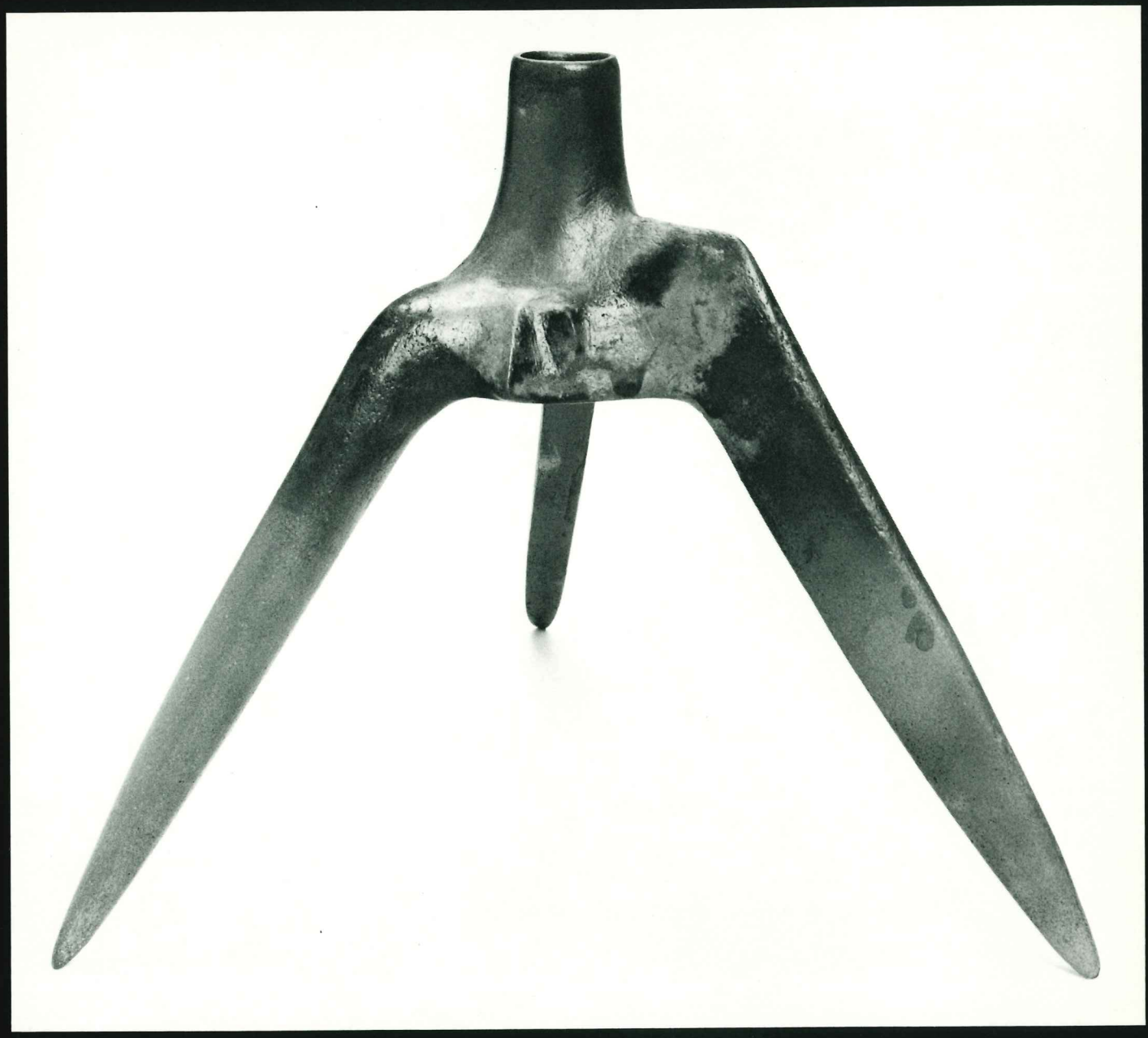
In his latest work, the central container has become more prominent, pointing up their vessel nature. While earlier tripods were wheel thrown and sophisticated, the newer ones are handbuilt of coils. They are more intimate, and relate to the human figure with their leglike protrusions, awkward carriage, and sense of gesture. And although it is unclear for what these *Ceremonial Cups* are intended, their link to past traditions and rituals underscores the ceremonial importance of the vessel in human life.

The *vessel* these tripods represent is the main focus of Hirsch's art. Rooted in ceramics, it is from that association his work obtains great strength: forms that echo neolithic predecessors, a precarious stance that emphasizes clay's fragility, mottled and smoky surfaces that testify to their trial by fire.

Rick Hirsch is interviewed by Susan Wechsler in her book, Low-Fire Ceramics, *just published by Watson-Guptill Publications; his work is on view at Impressions Gallery, Boston (April 1–30, 1982).*

Susan Wechsler has received a Services to the Field grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to interview contemporary clay artists.

Ceremonial Cup No. 9 *(1981), 12½" (31.8 cm) high. Photo: Bob Aude.*



Ceremonial Bowl *(1981), 11½" (29.2 cm) high. Courtesy The Elements, New York.*

Space Vessel *(1981), 14" (35.6 cm) high. Courtesy Impressions Gallery, Boston. Photo: Bob Aude.*

On Taking Risks

The Decline of the Avant-Garde

Tony Hepburn

This past summer, Dave Dorrance, Viola Frey, Katie Ohe, Peter Voulkos, and myself were invited by Les Manning, chairman of the Ceramics Department at Banff Centre for Continuing Education, to conduct workshops and critiques with twelve selected students of the department. They were provided with extensive workspaces and were judged on their abilities to perform under pressure. As I see it, an attempt was made to deal with a symptomatic state of purgatory defined by the conclusion of formalist art training and the embarkation on a career of making art. While the problems of art education existed (and I shall deal with some of these later), the program was catalyst to a wide range of issues beyond the syndrome of "training artists." In keeping with its professional approach, the program concluded with an exhibition of student work selected by Helen Williams Drutt.

The second half of the Banff experiment attempted to bridge the usual gulf between teacher and student, giver and receiver. Lorne Falk, curator of the Walter Phillips Gallery at Banff, wished to mount an exhibition of work by the visiting artists, but not in the usual, passive way. He was interested in "taking a risk . . . to give it an edge. . . . thinking about what it means to be a contemporary art gallery, and what it means to artists now." I subsequently agreed to make a "finished" piece that I had not made before, partly by sending instructions in advance, and partly by building a piece in the gallery with the help and guidance of the students. It was not a rehearsed performance, but embraced the same emotional conflict and turmoil that exist in one's private studio. Whether the piece would "work" or not was in constant doubt. The attendant tensions were the common denominator among all the people involved, and therefore it ceased to be a giver-receiver situation; or more accurately, those roles switched as the work progressed. This leads me to the point of this essay: the nature of risk-taking in art and, more particularly, the making of art using clay.

My initial considerations presupposed the need for an audience with which to take risks, based on Duchamp's theory of collaboration. That is, a work of art does not exist unless someone is looking at it. Subsequent thoughts turned up my belief that the making of good art grows out of anxiety, not complacence, and that this state of anxiety must exist in the studio (wherever that may be). Anxiety can take many forms, but it is generally characterized by not knowing, and the ensuing need for knowledge. As Carl Andre said, "Man climbs a mountain because it is there. I make art because it's not there."

The condition I wish to discuss lies somewhere between destructive disorder and predictability. The philosopher Goddard was once asked, "Surely you believe in beginning, middle, and end?" "Oh yes," he replied, "but not necessarily in that order." By its nature and by its historically prescribed tools and technology, the craft of working with clay somewhat negates the possibilities at which Goddard so succinctly hints—a fact that has been regrettably evident since the 1970s in an epidemic of technique-oriented claywork. Technique may inspire admiration, but it does not make work significant. We tend to enjoy things we cannot do ourselves, and so "do" them through empathy—getting a kind of excitement out of vicariously accomplishing the extremely difficult.[1] I am not suggesting that technical talents are unimportant, but they are only important in relation to the problem of making art, which concerns risk-taking. This indicates a hierarchy of tasks, and attempting to learn skills may be needed in order to solve certain problems. The risk here is that some skills may not be attainable.

Obviously, one does not make art in a state of constant disorder; the history of art is an ongoing attempt to bring order to the world. Rectangular paintings are testimony to that truth (almost to the point of absurdity). Human beings impose orderliness on their activities because it is so useful to do so. And works of art are subject to rationalization, like any other human product. The need for order, in art and in society, seems to be more acute in this century, perhaps as antidote to the ever-growing disorder of our social institutions. The effect of such compensation, as Rudolf Arnheim points out in *Art and Entropy,* is that people try to reduce tension wherever possible, being content "with a minimal structure at a low level of order" until, at its extreme, they find themselves faced with "the emptiness of homogeneity." (It's a curious fact that some of the same people who profess to be repelled by rows of identical human dwellings seem to admire rows of identical boxes in art galleries.)

Arnheim's sociological and metaphysical allusions have strong implications for the art of risk-taking. For artists do not have complete control over their art. When one makes the commitment to exhibit one's work, that is the first step in dealing with an unsympathetic, disinterested world, with dealers and dealing, with money and values, and, on a mundane level, with the transportation of one's work or idea from studio to gallery. History is littered with artists and art slaughtered or made sterile by such forces. There is considerable evidence to indicate that the economic condition of a nation is reflected in the art it produces. It is no coincidence, for example, that Pop Art emerged in the late fifties and early sixties—a period of great economic growth. People took risks in both the stock market and the art market. An

Andy Warhol could not emerge in the present decade.

Galleries are showing a preponderance of safe art—super-realist paintings and sculpture, landscape paintings, and the like—art that is easy to understand, that takes very few risks. The stock market is likewise conservative. Major museums have always acted conservatively, but for the past two or three decades New York's galleries have maintained the ability to surprise. Unfortunately, they are losing their provocative powers. The last refuge of risk-taking appears to be the university gallery, or similarly small, independent institutions. Hans Haacke refers to this problem in his article, "Working Conditions." University galleries are more insulated from the boards of their parent organizations, he argues, so that courageous directors with a sense of adventure can more easily present programs that would be unthinkable elsewhere. Many of these institutions have the added advantage of sizable intellectual communities they are meant to serve.

Haacke's aesthetic stance is of interest not only in relation to galleries, but in relation to the desirability of risk. Most of his work is political, though not in the illustrative sense of George Grosz or John Heartfield, but in a more direct, confrontational sense. One example may illustrate my point. In 1971, Haacke was invited to hold a one-man exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Haacke accepted, and dates were agreed upon. Two of the three works planned were photographic representations of large Manhattan real-estate holdings. An obvious implication of the information presented was that real-estate malpractices were being committed by some board members of the Guggenheim Museum. On April 3, 1971, Haacke received a letter from the President of the Board of Directors cancelling the show. A later statement by the President declared that he hoped "we can proceed with the Haacke show without diluting his creative intentions, but also without prejudice to our Institutional role."

The problems here are obvious. First, as Haacke himself puts it, "There is a large segment of society which deeply hopes that art is different, that art is produced, promoted, and consumed in a totally disinterested fashion. The liberal myth has it that beauty is ideologically neutral." Second, some large corporations who profess to be magnanimous benefactors are clearly using art to their own ends—promoting art, but only if it fits their corporate image or is economically viable. As Paul Elicker, president of SCM Corporation admits, "I can tell you that with the $150,000 a year we have allocated to our arts program, we are getting a lot more for our money. $150,000 would buy two and one-half minutes a year on national TV, and you can hardly call that a campaign."

Other more subtle influences exerted by galleries also affect artists' inclinations to take risks. Despite the venerable history, the social standing, and the cerebral rewards of art dealership, gallery owners must clearly consider works of art as merchandise, like any other. Dealers must live, and if a product sells, who can blame them if they hope it continues to sell? The artist, too, must live, and hence a beartrap of a different kind is set. Roy Lichtenstein's initial risk was to declare that comic-strip imagery could be high art. He succeeded in persuading the world; his Benday-dot imagery has been absorbed into the fabric of society, and what once seemed audacious now seems almost quaint. Lichtenstein has not risked any further change in his art. One can only speculate why, but his paintings now sell for $125,000 each. The above hints at the problems of style, as well as the notion of an avant-garde.

Of course, many artists are known by and for a style of working: Monet and Impressionism, Marilyn Levine and trompe-l'oeil clay, and so on. It is harder to label Cézanne, Duchamp, Frank Stella, Dennis Oppenheim, or Ree Morton. It's harder because their style, if they have one, is not visual. "What focuses our interest is Cézanne's anxiety," says Harold Rosenberg, "that's Cézanne's lesson." And Duchamp had been a relatively successful painter—he was selling his work—until 1912, when:

I brought the Nude Descending a Staircase *to the "Independents" (held in opposition to the conservative salon) and they asked me to withdraw it before the opening. In the most advanced group of the period, certain people had extraordinary qualms; a sort of fear! People like Gleizes, who were, nevertheless, extremely intelligent, found that this* Nude *wasn't in the line that they predicted. Cubism had lasted two or three years, and they had already an absolutely clear line on it, foreseeing everything that might happen. As a reaction against such behavior coming from artists whom I had believed to be free, I got a job as a librarian.*

Later, Duchamp stressed the need to contradict even his own sense of taste, and to attempt to never repeat himself in his work. All this points to the primary function of twentieth-century art—to probe the unknown.

A capitalist society measures success in dollars. Robert Rauschenberg is a millionaire, but so is Anton Trechicov, whose *Charging Elephants* has been reproduced in print more times than any other picture ever painted. It clearly appeals to the lowest common denominator, and with adequate market research, no doubt other equally successful images could be found. A more meaningful measure of success is the degree of influence a given work or artist has had on the field. Duchamp has certainly been successful in this sense.

Of Duchamp's many innovations, one is particularly apt here. In an attempt to detach his own sense of touch from his work, Duchamp decided to employ chance. The result was *Three Standard Stoppages* (1913)—"an experiment made to imprison and preserve forms obtained through chance, through my chance." The ripples of that piece spread through Motherwell, Kline, de Kooning, and John Cage to Voulkos, Mason, and other clay artists. The far-reaching effects of Duchamp's example were catalytic to Voulkos's influence on the field of ceramics. While Oriental notions of chance provided an East-West wedge on Voulkos, a typically American cavalier spirit resulted. The dynamics of chance are what propelled Voulkos and others in the fifties, which involved the inherent risk of leaving a material to its own devices. Is a material, by itself, capable of performing as a work of art? No. And not because chance or the natural behavior of materials are incapable of producing significant combinations, but because no material can in fact be left to its own devices. To quote Clement Greenberg:

Given the present degree of aesthetics self-consciousness, even the most haphazard scattering of debris, if carried out in the milieu of art, has become purposive through the fact that accident is by now a fifty-year-old technique for creating art.

The Voulkos legacy, once a risk, has been adopted as dictum; looseness is desirable, tightness inhibits creation. Unfortunately, "creative intuition" is sometimes only a cover for a lot of bad habits. In retrospect, it would seem that Voulkos absorbed some of these aspects of working with clay and, when he turned to bronze, established "the most slapstick, do-it-yourself foundry on record," in the words of Joe Pugliese. I have a hunch that Voulkos's subsequent return to clay was motivated by his need for a moment-to-moment dialogue with a material where gravity tends to be a primary forming element, and which in turn establishes a dialogue of a unique nature.

By employing chance in the way he did, Duchamp equally employed gravity, as did Jackson Pollock. By employing chance and gravity, one enters the domain of high risk, the potentially fertile ground for doing something one has not done before. In relation to his felt sculpture of 1967, Robert Morris outlined the characteristics of nonrigid sculpture:

direct manipulation of materials without the use of manufactured tools; considerations of gravity as important as those of space; the forms not planned in

advance; organization de-emphasized, chance and indeterminacy accepted; disengagement from pre-conceived, enduring forms.

The irony of ceramics, especially in relation to the above, is that when fired it becomes one of the most enduring substances we know, and that societies have been judged by their ceramic remains. Jean Arp, on the other hand, accepts impermanence: "The decay that begins immediately on completion of the work is now welcome to me. The dying of a picture no longer brings despair for me." Ceramics can share this condition, until the decision to petrify it is made.

The extreme extension of Voulkos's use of gravity was seen in many subsequent works: Joe Soldate's *Clay Gravity Piece* (1977), Jim Melchert's *Changes* (1972), and my *Material Piece 7* (1970), to name a few. Response to these works was largely negative, for several reasons. They were not objects, they could not be acquired, they did not comply with the classical stance of sculpture (such as Michelangelo's *David* or Barnett Newman's *Broken Obelisk*), and they were neither aggressive nor optimistic in implication (as is the Empire State Building).

Implicit in the concept of taking risks is the notion of performing acts that are unfamiliar, or where the outcome is unknown.

Associated with this is the notion of the avant-garde. As in science and technology, members of the avant-garde in art try to understand past achievements and build from them new, expanded models. The ability to perform avant-garde acts, therefore, rests on knowledge of one's field and one's time. An example of this activity was the Funk Art movement of the 1960s, which was daring for three reasons. It challenged the accepted role of clay as a passive, decoratively applied material; it challenged the cosmetic tastes of its audience; and it was California-based at a time when New York was the art world's capital. Peter Selz described it well:

Funk art is hot rather than cool. It is committed, rather than disengaged, it is bizarre rather than formal, it is sensuous, and frequently it is quite ugly and ungainly. It is nonsculptural in any traditional way and irreverent in attitude.

One could argue that the works of Claes Oldenburg had all these characteristics, as did those of Joseph Beuys. What is important is that the artists involved—Robert Arneson, Fred Bauer, William Geis, Stephen Kaltenbach, Peter Vandenberge, and others—*felt* they were on the edge, that they were breaking new ground, and the work reflected this spirit. Being on the edge appears to be necessary for some artists. Compare Selz's comments with those of Ronny Cohen, describing the characteristics of the most recent "ism"—"energism":

Energist attitude is the product of personal rules, a substitution of the do's and don't's sanctified by "isms." Jon Borofsky's autobiographically based, stylistically universalized images also have a high reach-out profile, slamming us perceptually and emotionally from the walls on which they are applied. . . . Energism is not boring. Concentrating on the lamp, an energist metaphor if ever there was one. R. M. Fischer makes his own functional versions, freely mixing forms and materials appropriate to both lamp and modernist art. His aim is to probe and point out the cultural conditioning which dictates our responses to and expectations for lamps.

Cohen's championing statements sound desperate, and somewhat echo Funk's aspirations. Substitute "pots" for "lamps" and Cohen's last sentence could equally pertain to Betty Woodman and other potters who have been toiling for many years with those two goals in mind. The search for an avant-garde is by now something of a holy grail, which makes risk-taking an increasingly opaque possibility. Says Clement Greenberg:

The mediums are exploding, painting turns into sculpture, sculpture into architecture, not only the boundaries between the arts but also the boundaries between art and everything that is not art are being obliterated. And to add to the confusion, high art is on the way to becoming popular art and vice versa.

Robert Smithson went into the desert to carve away the earth, declaring that he was a post-studio artist, a post-gallery artist. It became known as Earth Art. Once one recognizes that one is within a movement or part of a collective consciousness, the feeling of risk naturally diminishes. Gregory Battcock has made a career of compiling and publishing anthologies of writings on given movements. Minimal Art, Conceptual Art, Super-Realism—he has run out of movements. Alan Sondheim has produced the most recent anthology, *Individuals,* whose title reflects the current art world's lack of identity.

The present climate of flux and change, the intercontinental exchange of ideas and images, make it harder to establish one's *own* cultural ground vis-à-vis art, which was a given in the art of the past. Art has been plunged into a state of uncertainty; it continues in a spirit of nostalgia. Richard DeVore's emergence represents a timely resurrection of secure values that "we have always held true"—a declaration that the avant-garde never really existed, or if it did, it was superficial and would inevitably be replaced by something of lasting value.

Garth Clark proclaims, "Once the charms of more flamboyant expression is past, vessel-making may be the most enduring ceramic expression of the decade." Clark's stance is curiously reminiscent of Greenberg's during the 1950s, when he championed Abstract Expressionism and ultimately measured all artistic achievements from that standpoint. Greenberg's position inevitably became anachronistic, a pitfall for anyone committed to packaging art for public consumption, to providing rounded histories for amateur authorities. Even worse is the tendency to make art and artists fit a theory in order to establish a convenient morphology. Even while accepting the current climate of conservatism, I still support the concept of an avant-garde—even if it is a wildly optimistic, personal need, a need to know that artists will continue to prod and provoke my own blinkered understanding of what art is or can be.

So far I have concerned myself with risk-taking in the arts in general. I shall now briefly consider this issue in relation to art education, for the dissolution of the avant-garde has caused the greatest problems for young artists. Consider the conditions that engendered past communities of the avant-garde: small, mutually abrasive groups gathering in a Paris café to consider the possibilities of Cézanne's achievements and to probe Cubism; at the Cedar Tavern in New York to consider what was necessary to break European academicism; at St. Martin's Sculpture School in London to lay Tony Caro's aesthetic to rest in favor of ephemeral materials; in the basement of the Otis Art Institute to test the limits of "why not" in clay. First these artists considered what had been achieved, then they embarked upon what had not been achieved.

The problem today is that art has become an academic discipline. Art students feel they must be given grades, must be assured that they are doing the "right" thing, must be instructed in the strategies of being a professional. Reviewing the Whitney annual of 1970, Harold Rosenberg commented, "I am dismayed at the degree of sheer cleverness and expertise displayed." Echoing Baudelaire's observations on the salons of the last century, Rosenberg adds: "Everyone is painting better and better, which seems a lamentable thing." These remarks hint at the problems of "training" artists. As young artists must now jump through requisite hoops, their education undermines risk-taking. The artist's studio, an area dominated by isolation and metaphor, is replaced by a maze of tests. As one educator put it, the universities place highest value on *production.* This is especially prevalent in the field of ceramic art, probably due to its origins in production pottery. Rosenberg suggests that "studio courses are a kind of vocational training that swings from the extreme of Avant-Garde to an extreme of standing pat on whatever techniques the instructor has been practicing as an artist." This has grave implications for the teaching community, which is clearly not immune to these dangers. Indeed, the very institution of tenure runs counter to risk-taking; risks are avoided in order to receive it, and then one can sit out one's tenure in total security.

I am suggesting that alternatives to the present art academies must be found. The Banff Centre is only one of many alternatives available to young aspiring artists who seek learning experiences rather than certification. The BFA and MFA degrees are only evidence that someone has spent a certain amount of time deciding whether or not to make a commitment to art, and are not evidence that someone has been trained to *become* an artist.

Finally, let's consider aspects of risk-taking peculiar to clay. From the outset, its own history is something of a millstone; its basis in craft has deterred serious consideration by the art world at large. Hence, to embark on this path the artist risks obscurity and misinterpretation. In addition, the attendant technology is expensive to buy and to operate, and getting clay into the air can be troublesome. (There is something almost perverse in the effort to make a material so yielding and so submissive to gravity stand three to six feet high.) Clay artists sought to desanctify their material at a time when bronze and marble were still celebrating themselves. (Even as recently as 1979, when Manuel Neri painted his bronzes, gasps of disbelief could be heard.)

There are still no critics capable of understanding ceramics and locating it in a suitable context, but that is changing. Tony Caro and Michael Steiner still take their clayworks to be cast in bronze, but artists' attitudes are changing, too. Finally, we are seeing many a modernist taboo—decoration is the outstanding example—being overturned by today's painters, sculptors, and architects.

As part of this changing climate, clay will certainly undergo a more sympathetic, albeit rigorous, examination than it has heretofore received. If clay artists continue to devote attention to both form *and* surface (as, for example, in the exemplary work of Viola Frey), the medium will demonstrate its multiple virtues, now only known to devotees. And if its artists continue to take risks (which has more to do with a state of anxiety than with the unprecedented), they will escape the myriad dangers that have derailed or cut short so many promising artists.

1. Although this is complicated by the fact that only in the physical sense is a work of art an object upon which the human body operates. The actual "function" of an artwork is mental, and the artist's striving toward orderliness is guided by the perceptual and mental pulls and pushes he or she observes within the work while it is being shaped.

Tony Hepburn, chairman of the Division of Art and Design at Alfred University, will be showing recent work in May at Exhibit A Gallery, Chicago. This essay will be included in an anthology of writings on the making and exhibiting of art, to be published by the Banff Centre for Continuing Education, Calgary, Canada.

Mocking the Strongman Image

The Vessels of Christopher Gustin **Sarah Bodine**

Two looming black forms have invaded the pristine whiteness of the neat display shelves. Their wide-brimmed hats cast ominous shadows over their massive bodies and in their squat stance they seem to be brooding. But the forms beckon; their reticence is alluring. Their smooth, silky exteriors are gentle to the touch and their strong handles beg to be lifted. . . . It is soon apparent that the quiet appeal of this work by Chris Gustin derives from a rigorously pursued set of problems: exploration into spatial relationships, controlled surface treatment, and the limitations imposed by function on ceramic form.

Human proportions and allusions to parts of the body—such as a handle resembling the attachment of the arm to the shoulder—are Gustin's formal vocabulary. In its redistribution of body scale, the work could be compared to that of artist Horst Antes, whose squat human forms assume homuncular proportions—massive heads with tiny torsos, thick legs, and protruding feet. Similarly, Gustin will exaggerate one element of a pot to carry the message. "You can make a real understated pot and the handle will be the entire piece," Gustin explains. "It will define everything. Without the handle, you've got nothing." Unlike Antes, however, Gustin does not allow the explicit imagery of the figure to predominate. Instead, he reduces the figure to more basic elements—geometry, space, and light—and manipulates these. For example, if a traditional torso is seen as an inverted triangle, Gustin will turn it upside down, making the waist broader than the shoulders. The game is to see whether this formal relationship can be made viable and pleasing.

His large covered jars are the outcome of this exploration. In them Gustin scrutinizes the relationship of the shoulder to the foot; the way the lid overhangs or fits snugly to the rim of the jar can affect the entire stance of the pot. Although the jar by itself might be an awkward shape (potter Jim Makins once commented, "It looks like he's taken a clumsy beginner's bowl and turned it upside down"), when the overhanging lid is added, a pleasing balance is achieved.

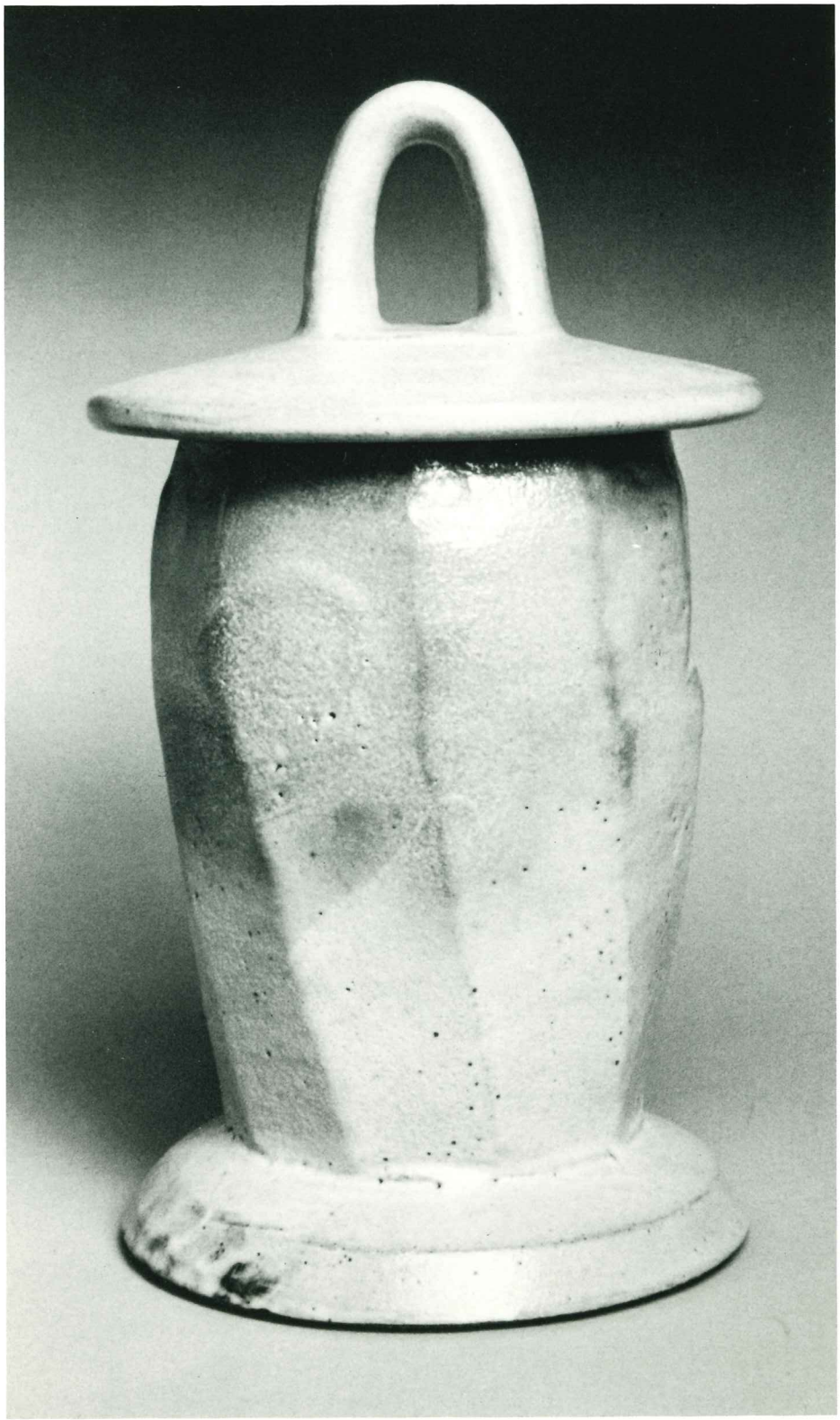
The profile of his oversized teapots is yet another allusion to the human torso. Here a narrow body struggles to support a bulbous, inflated chest. The spout appears to be an arm raised high in the hope of keeping the chest aloft. What saves the piece from collapse is the starkly contrasting flattened handle, whose horseshoe arch rises from the shoulder and confidently draws the chest up to fullest capacity. These teapots mock their strongman image by the exaggeration of their fragile balance and the vulnerability of even the most solid-looking form.

Gustin himself is concerned that his work not be considered simply macho pottery. "I want my pots to really affect a space, to define a space in a room, to become a focal point," he says. Although size and weight do contribute to this end, the restrained severity of the work is even more significant. This restraint is attributable to a Japanese aesthetic prevalent during Gustin's undergraduate years at the Kansas City Art Institute. From the Japanese principles of understatement, of soft hues and irregular shapes, of limitations imposed by traditional forms and uses, Gustin has learned not to try to say too much with one piece. He reduces the form to its essentials of mass, proportion, and color and lets it go at that. The monumental quality of the work alone is enough to draw our attention, and a less controlled treatment could render it busy and confusing.

The way light plays on form also helps define its presence. Gustin treats the surface of a pot with a minimum of color and texture, limiting himself to four glazes: a textured semimatte white, a shiny black, a soft matte black and a matte red. For further tonality, he occasionally sandblasts these. The effect of this softening and breaking up of the surface is to suck light into the form, allowing the eye to examine it without distracting reflections.

Another approach to exploring form and surface through glaze texture is seen on Gustin's large platters. Here quick, bold finger strokes made through the wet glaze draw the eye from the rim into the center of the form and out again. The playful vitality of these lines breaks up and enlivens the surface, denying the platter's circular nature.

Gustin has begun to experiment with spontaneous drawing on his enclosed forms, this time from the inside. Indistinct bumps and bulges on the outer skin hint that the work has somehow been turned inside out, and the viewer itches to lift a lid to see the "real" design on the interior. In this way Gustin challenges the viewer to

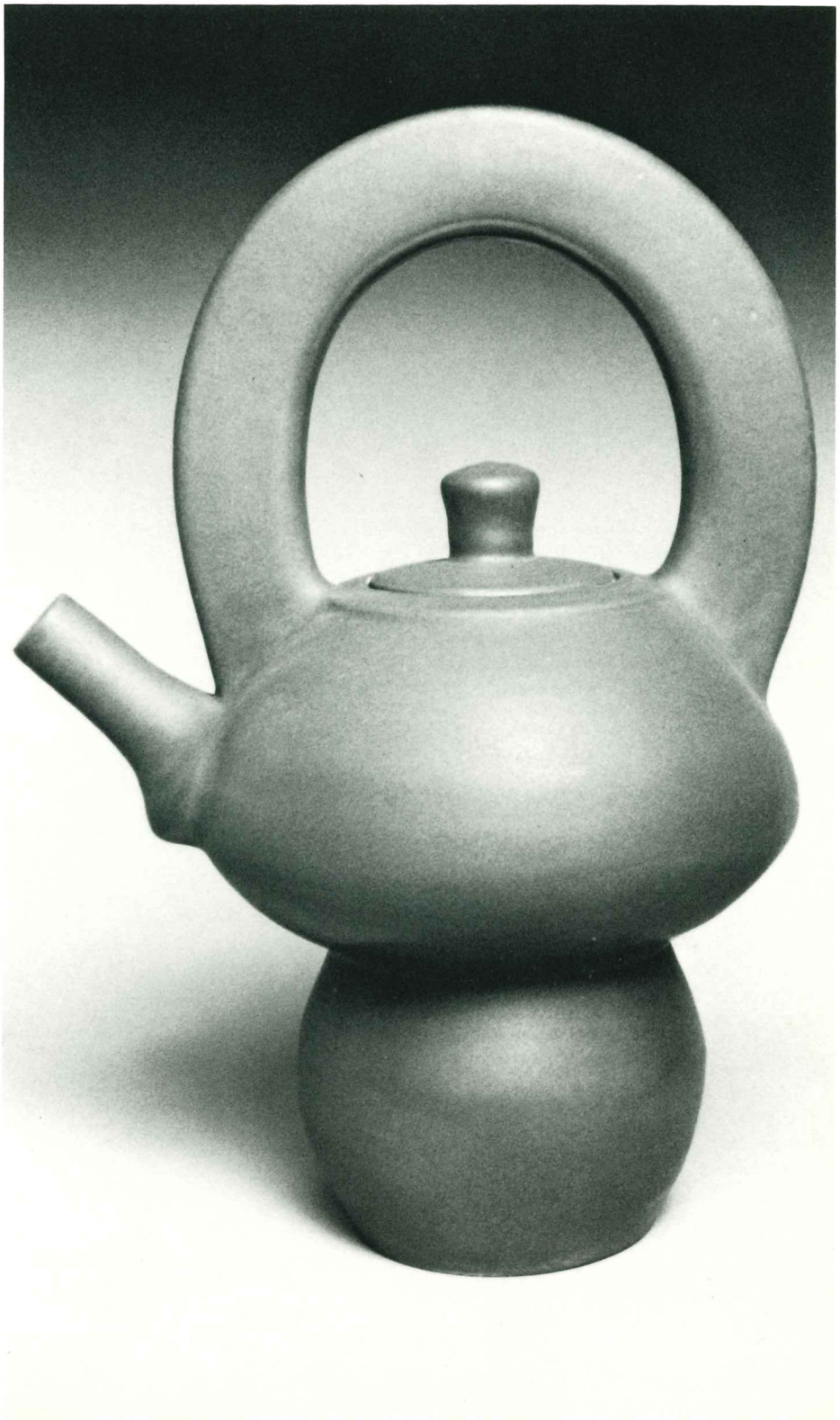


Covered Jar *(1981), 17" (43 cm) high, stoneware.*

Covered Jar *(1981), 14" (35.6 cm) high, stoneware.*

Teapot *(1981), 16" (40.6 cm) high, stoneware.*

Platter *(1981), 25" (63.5 cm) diameter, stoneware.*



touch and handle the work, to experience it as fully as the potter has.

The freshness and spontaneity of Gustin's large forms are the result of both proficiency and diligent attention to detail. Spontaneity for Gustin is not to be found in a loose line, but in the vigor and strength of the entire form. In making a covered jar or teapot with twenty to thirty-five pounds of clay, however, the throwing is out of control most of the time, until the final shaping. Overworking a form can result in loss of immediacy and freshness, so preserving this immediacy is a constant challenge. "In putting a lot of different shapes together, you're constantly trying to keep the pots wet and constantly rubbing them down and working on them, trying to maintain a freshness. You've got to keep working and working and working but still try to keep it alive." To do this Gustin must employ the only agent that keeps the clay pliable—water. Water also works to weaken and distort the form, however, so the pots must be thrown uniformly thick to compensate, which accounts for their weight. Attachment of handles or spouts must be accomplished decisively in order not to seem sloppy or contrived.

The success rate under such strict standards and constant experimentation is not high, and Gustin's work cycle is painstakingly slow. For example, it takes him three to four months to throw one hundred to two hundred pots, five to six weeks to make one hundred platters. He spends time drawing before approaching ideas in three dimensions, and many pots collapse during the throwing stage. Others are rejected after they have been completely assembled, although Gustin will sometimes allow a questionable pot to go through the entire bisquing, glazing, and firing process before he determines its success or failure.

The success of the work is due to this rigorous discipline and continual reevaluation. Gustin is constantly on the offensive, questioning and exploring. As a consequence, his pots have guts.

Chris Gustin's recent work was shown at Hadler/Rodriguez Galleries, New York (February 17–March 4).

Sarah Bodine is a freelance writer, the editor of Metalsmith *magazine, and a potter living in Manhattan.*

Boobies, Boojums, and Snarks

The Victorian Visions of the Martin Brothers

Diana L. Johnson

When Robert Wallace Martin died at the age of eighty in July of 1923, his death brought to a close a remarkable chapter in the history of British studio ceramics. As the driving force behind the Martin Brothers Pottery, Wallace Martin (as he was generally known) joined a craftsman's skill to unswerving ambition and an inventive eccentricity of mind. During the heyday of the pottery, from the late 1870s through the first decade of the twentieth century, Martin and three of his brothers devoted their considerable talents to the production of salt-glazed stoneware. Creating on the one hand vessels and objects not dissimilar from those produced by major comtemporary studios, such as the Doulton Pottery, the Martin Brothers' signature images were the result of a more imaginative vision. They modeled a fantasy world of ceramic grotesques, monsters, and curious birds, and these weird and wonderful creatures, along with more traditional examples of Martinware, are currently commanding a well-deserved revival on both sides of the Atlantic.[1]

Wallace Martin was born in London in 1843, the first of nine children. Of these, three, Charles Douglas (born in 1846), Walter Fraser (born in 1857), and Edwin Bruce, the youngest child, would later join Wallace in establishing the highly individual Martin Brothers Pottery of London and Southall. Martin *père* was a stationer's clerk, whose uncle by marriage was in turn the brother of Sir Charles Barry, chief architect responsible for the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament following the disastrous fire of 1834. This complicated family relationship played an important role in the early career of Wallace Martin.

Wallace's youth was spent in lodgings (probably obtained by Barry) near the construction site for the rebuilding of Parliament. His initiation into that important movement, labeled the Gothic Revival, came through constant exposure to the work in progress at Parliament and the proximity of the Architectural Museum in Canon Row. The museum's collection contained numerous casts of early Gothic ornament—gargoyles, monsters, and more mundane carvings—donated by the art critic John Ruskin, the architect William Burges, and other proponents of this most fanciful and very English style.

At the age of fifteen, Wallace was offered a three-month trial position and future apprenticeship by the sculptor John Birnie Philip, a follower of Augustus Welby Pugin and an active participant in the Gothic Revival. Philip was responsible for much of the sculptural ornamentation for the new Houses of Parliament. After working with Philip for three months, however, Wallace decided to decline the apprenticeship in favor of a more independent course.

Much of the published material about the Martin brothers in general or Wallace in particular gives some of the credit for his independent turn of mind to the influence of Samuel Smiles's popular volume, *Self-Help,* published in 1859, the same year in which Charles Darwin issued *The Origin of Species.* Like most Victorians, Wallace Martin was undoubtedly influenced by Darwin's dramatic concept of powerful natural forces producing either beneficial or frightful creative accidents through time, but Smiles's book was the more immediate influence at this period. Possibly with the advice of the book's title in mind, he gave his father some drawings and carvings to bring to the attention of Sir Charles Barry. Soon after, Wallace was made an assistant to one of the masons at Parliament, where he worked until shortly after Sir Charles Barry's death in May of 1860. Toward the end of that year, he first attended classes at the Lambeth School of Art, where he met the potter George Tinworth, later to gain fame as a modeler at Doulton's and as a sculptor of anthropomorphic animal fantasies.

During the next several years, Wallace worked for the sculptor Alexander Munro, whose studio was a meeting place for several of the Pre-Raphaelite painters and their critics, among them the Rossettis and John Ruskin. On his own he submitted a portrait in plaster to the Royal Academy and following its acceptance entered the Royal Academy Schools with George Tinworth for further study. After leaving Munro's employ around 1866, he submitted several terra cotta panels to the Royal Academy and worked on various private commissions. During lean times he cleaned statuary, often being recommended to clients by his neighbor, the artist and critic Henry Merritt, another important advocate of the Gothic Revival.

In 1869, Wallace Martin opened a studio in Kennington Road and at about the same time, the determined young craftsman became a member of the Plymouth Brethren, a fundamentalist religious sect, whose visions of Hell-fire undoubtedly joined the collection of Gothic demons already swirling in his head. At Kennington, he began to experiment with the production of practical objects, primarily tobacco jars. He, like other Lambeth students, had often made use of the kiln at Doulton's, but this arrangement would not have been suitable for a potential commercial venture like the tobacco jars and Martin turned instead to C. J.C. Bailey at the Fulham Pottery.

During the next few years, Wallace expanded his relationship with Fulham Pottery, working on commissions for Bailey while experimenting endlessly with his own ideas. He was much encouraged when Doulton's opened an art pottery department as an adjunct to their utilitarian lines. Their decision to do so presumed a growing market for fine ceramics, whether in terra cotta, which Wallace favored, or the salt-glazed stoneware regularly produced by Doulton's.

The Martin Brothers: Walter, Wallace and Edwin.

On January 7, 1873, the Martin family moved to Pomona House near the Fulham Pottery; there Wallace Martin with two of his brothers, Walter Fraser and Edwin Bruce, launched their first pottery in earnest. The two younger Martin brothers had previously worked for Doulton's and would have been apprenticed to the firm if Wallace had not lured them away.

The newly established Martin pottery maintained an arrangement with Fulham Pottery to fire its wares and Walter Martin developed a productive friendship with the French sculptor and potter Jean-Charles Cazin, who was then working at Fulham. Although much of the production at Pomona House consisted of ornamental work for architects, Wallace in particular continued to work on his own designs. He concentrated at first upon clockcases in the Gothic style, which he embellished with grotesque creatures similar to those he had grown up with during his early days at the Houses of Parliament. These adornments prefigured the bizarre creatures he would model somewhat later in his career. As Charles R. Beard observed of these later productions: "Indeed, it is not improbable that his leering birds, his laughing, mocking faces, and his gaping monsters are directly traceable to the monstrous finials, corbels and gargoyles among which he then [as a youth] worked."[2]

Wallace Martin's earlier allegiance to terra cotta gave way to a growing interest in salt-glazed stoneware. The lessons learned by the two younger Martins at Doulton's were certainly helpful during this transitional period. The Pomona House pottery produced stoneware exhibiting a variety of decorative techniques, including etched and stamped designs, carving in low relief, and the addition of molded forms to achieve high relief. These techniques were used by Doulton's and other potteries and were by no means unique to the Martin firm.

Stylistically, much of the Martin brothers' output was likewise part of the mainstream of Victorian pottery design. From about 1870 to the close of the century, British ceramics developed through two major currents. The first consisted of highly finished wares exhibiting both elegant design and technical refinement, while the second, a reaction in part to the first, included art pottery of a more personal expressiveness whose forms more closely derived from organic, natural sources. The exquisite pâte-sur-pâte vases created at Minton's are splendid examples of the first category of work, while Doulton's stoneware and the creations of the Martin family fall into the second.

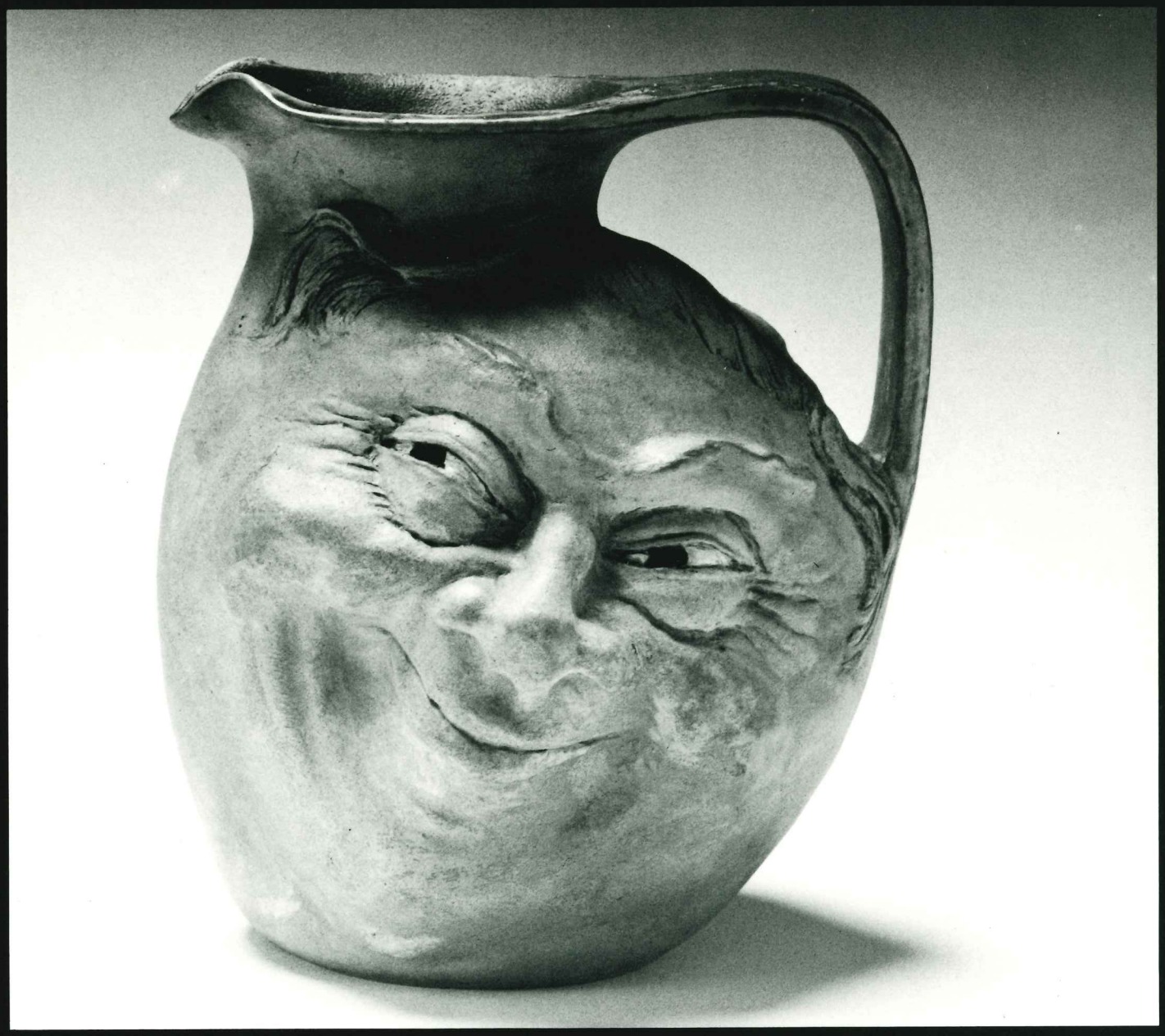
The philosophical underpinnings for the type of work produced at the studio potteries came from a variety of sources, not always in agreement with each other. The earlier work of the Martins, with its emphasis on orderly, geometric designs, reflected the approach of Owen Jones (whose monumental *Grammar of Ornament* was first published in 1856) and of the artist, writer, and botanist Dr. Christopher Dresser. Both Jones and Dresser focused on the beauty and regularity of form to be found in nature, while other influential writers and designers—most importantly William Morris and John Ruskin—valued the vitality of irregular forms and the role of the imagination. The later work of the Martin brothers tended to reflect both points of view, ranging as it did from the highly imaginative yet realistically detailed grotesques modeled largely by Wallace to the gourds and other restrained organic forms created by Edwin.

Contemporary trends, from the Cult of Japan to Medievalism, influenced the Martins at various periods, and like most other artists, illustrators, and designers of the period, they were susceptible to the appeal of the various period or "national" styles—classical, medieval, Renaissance, Celtic, Persian, and Oriental—which captured the imagination of artists and public alike. The eclecticism of the Victorian era is now well documented and as a trend it persisted well into the twentieth century. Gothic, Japanese, and Renaissance styles predominated in the Martins' repertoire, however, and these influences manifested themselves in everything from the colors of the glazes and the textures of the pottery to the transformation of individual design motifs. While Wallace in particular derived a large part of his artistic vocabulary from the Gothic Revival, all three craftsmen were influenced by the pervasive *Japonisme* which infected Europe from the late sixties. The Martins were familiar as well with both the foliate and heraldic designs of the Italian Renaissance and the bolder motifs of Continental Mannerism. The exaggerated naturalism of the French Renaissance artist-potter Bernard Palissy must also have had great appeal. Palissy's ceramic platters and studies of marine life and dense vegetation, with their rich, earth-colored glazes, provided a counterpoint to the refined naturalism and asymmetry of Japanese design.

Although not a commercial threat to the large-scale production at Doulton's, the Martins' enterprise at Pomona House was reasonably successful and their patrons included the Earl of Carlisle, Sir Walter Trevelyan, Edward Burne-Jones, the bankers Stuart Hodgson and Sir Samuel Hoare, and the ironmonger Frederick Nettlefold, who became their lifelong benefactor.[3] This success was not without its strains, however, and a break with Bailey at the Fulham Pottery precipitated the move from Pomona House to suburban Southall. Frederick Nettlefold lent the three brothers the money to purchase a site upon which to establish a full-fledged pottery and kiln, and early in 1877 the sale was completed. At about the same time, Nettlefold made available to the brothers a property on Brownlow Street in Holborn, London, to be used as an "in-town" shop for the wares they would produce

Spoon Warmer *(n.d.), 4¾" (12 cm) high, designed by Robert Wallace Martin. Photo: Scott Hyde.*

(Opposite page) Pair of Covered Jars *(1888), 9" and 8¾" (22.9 and 22.2 cm) high, designed by Robert Wallace Martin. Collection Allen Harriman and Edward Judd. Photo: John Chang McCurdy.*



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at Southall.

In this manner the Martin Brothers Pottery of London and Southall came into being. A fourth brother, Charles Martin, left his job in Reading to join his brothers as manager of the Brownlow Street shop, which remained throughout its existence a rather quaint and dusty refuge from the outside world. Charles was an inspired choice for manager and he became the firm's arbiter of taste, collecting Oriental and botanical prints as well as other appealing images to serve as inspiration at the pottery. Martinware, like other contemporary ceramics, gradually began to reflect a less stylized, purer mode of naturalism and Charles was sensitive to the necessity to respond to this shift. At Southall, Walter Martin developed a broader range of colored glazes to allow a more painterly, expressive approach to design. This enabled stoneware to compete more effectively with the hand-painted china then coming into vogue, which was being produced at Minton's, Wedgwood, and other factories.

Although both Japanese and Renaissance styles remained the dominant modes of design at the Martin Brothers Pottery from the 1880s until the firm ceased operation, both types of decoration eventually shifted decisively toward greater naturalism. Perhaps it was this trend, or simply the pressure of time, that spurred Wallace Martin to move toward a very personal and quite peculiar form of naturalism. In some ways, as several writers have recently pointed out,[4] Wallace's grotesqueries were actually rather *retarditaire,* more nearly reflecting the unknown terrors of the monstrous machines and furnaces of the early Industrial Revolution, the neo-Gothicism of Pugin, and the specter of mutations and other signs of Darwinism run amok than High Victorian optimism. In any case, the first individual grotesque monsters and bizarre birds (frequently referred to as tobacco jars) appear to date from around 1880 and they were certainly in full production by 1882.

There seem to be as many parallels in contemporary literature and illustration for the type of creatures Wallace began to model as there are corresponding sources in the history of art and ceramics. Anthropomorphism was a strong current in later nineteenth-century British fantasy literature and illustration, and to some extent Wallace's bird-characters might be considered the ceramic equivalents of Edward Lear's nonsense verse and Lewis Carroll's literary drolleries. Carroll had in fact been a frequent visitor to Alexander Munro's studio at the time when the young Wallace was working for Munro. The late Victorian illustrator Ernest Griset,[5] who had borrowed so effectively from J.J. Grandville's *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux* (published in France between 1840 and 1842), is a possible influence, as is the painter and designer H. Stacy Marks. There were, of course, numerous other illustrators of the period producing images of humanoid birds and beasts.[6] Martinware in turn may have influenced the illustrators; certainly some of Arthur Rackham's birds (dating from the early twentieth century) exhibit the same cock-eyed deviltry as many of Wallace's fantasies—relatives in spirit if not in fact. George Tinworth and another Doulton potter who had previously worked with Wallace, Mark V. Marshall, also produced stoneware beasts, but mice and dragons rather than feathered creatures were the favored characters in their respective repertoires.

Much has been written about whether Wallace's birds and other creatures are benign or malevolent, a subject better left perhaps to psychoanalysts. In passing, however, it should be remembered that Wallace Martin's religion rested upon an extremely literal interpretation of the Bible, with correspondingly vivid images of sin and damnation. Further, the potter's favorite author, Charles Dickens, was a master at conjuring up images of grotesque and depraved characters. Interpretation in the final analysis is left to the eye of the beholder, though an almost obligatory quote for articles on Martinware is appropriate here—a delightful commentary upon a series of Wallace Martin's rather small, assorted beasts whose most striking feature is an open, gaping mouth. Writing of these "gaping boobies," the late nineteenth-century poet and critic Cosmo Monkhouse explained that to such "silly ill-tempered creatures, with their vast but empty heads, is fitly assigned the duty of warming spoons. . . ."[7]

Slightly less bizarre than the birds or the spoon warmers but equally intriguing are the face jugs Wallace modeled from about 1885 onward. It is easier to suggest specific visual sources for these double-sided pots than for the birds. Early source material certainly included classical portrayals of the double-faced Roman god Janus and other representations in pottery of the lustier gods of pagan antiquity. The omnipresent Bellarmine jugs, pottery caricatures of the unpopular sixteenth-century Italian cardinal of the same name, undoubtedly represented an influence closer in time to the Martins' own period, as did the general category of Toby jugs. Even closer in time and place were the grotesque heads modeled by the early nineteenth-century Lambeth potter Charles Bloodworth. All of these sources would have been available to Wallace at some point in his career, either in the original or through reproductions. The time, in any case, was right for Wallace's endeavors, for developments in the art of photography had rekindled the nineteenth-century fascination with the study of physiognomy. Regardless of their specific sources, the Martin face jugs, like the birds, ultimately remain the unique product of Wallace's fertile imagination and even the few recognizable portrait jugs transcend time and place.

(Top) Double-sided Face Jug *(1899), 7¼" (18.4 cm) high, designed by Robert Wallace Martin. Collection Jordan-Volpe Gallery. Photo: John Chang McCurdy.*

Covered Jar *(1895), 10½" (26.7 cm) high, designed by Robert Wallace Martin. Collection Mr. and Mrs. David Hoffman. Photo: Scott Hyde.*

Despite the relative commercial success of both Wallace Martin's remarkable birds and beasts and the more traditional products of the Martin Brothers Pottery, craft-oriented studios such as theirs faced an increasing threat from the economies of mass production enjoyed by the larger firms. This challenge grew with time and after the turn of the century the strain on the Martin family was apparent. A brief respite, due largely to the creative endeavors of Edwin Martin, could not reverse the trend, but temporarily gave the studio new life. Edwin devoted his efforts to the production of a charming series of pottery forms derived from objects in nature, usually gourds and other vegetable forms. A young architect, Sydney Greenslade, was captivated by these creations and he attempted to inspire the potters to renewed activity.

In 1898, Greenslade took Edwin to an exhibition in London of the work of the sophisticated French studio potter Auguste Delaherche, and two years later Greenslade traveled to Paris with the three younger Martins to visit the *Exposition Universelle.* Greenslade's influence over the firm soon overshadowed that of Charles Martin; when the Brownlow Street shop was severely damaged by fire in 1903, Charles went into a decline from which he would never recover.

Wallace had always been domineering, and this period of stress at the pottery did little to soften his temperament. Production at Southall became increasingly erratic as Walter and Edwin often refused to obey the commands of the eldest Martin. This state of affairs made the pottery less and less able to fend off the challenge of both the principal firms like Doulton's and newer competitors such as Pilkington's, whose elegant lusterware provided a striking contrast to the traditional salt-glazed Martinware.

Economic difficulties were soon overshadowed by personal tragedy. Charles Martin was diagnosed as insane in 1909 and died the following year. Two years later Walter died of a cerebral hemorrhage. Wallace and Edwin, rather than attempting to save both the family relationship and the pottery after these terrible losses, became further estranged. Poor health prevented Edwin from striking out on his own and he died of cancer in April of 1915.

Wallace Martin, the first and now the last of the Martin brothers, continued to work sporadically, assisted by his son Clement. With Wallace Martin's death in 1923, the story of the Martin Brothers Pottery and the family who guided its fortunes came to an end. Clement Martin's efforts to revive the firm were ultimately unsuccessful, and it has taken the recent revival of interest in studio ceramics to give the Martin Brothers Pottery renewed life.

1. The current revival began with the exhibition of Martinware organized by Richard Dennis in London in 1978. See: Malcolm Haslam, *The Martin Brothers Potters* (London: Richard Dennis, 1978). On this side of the Atlantic, The Jordan-Volpe Gallery in New York initiated an exhibition first shown at the gallery (November 3, 1981–February 13, 1982), then traveling to the Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington (March 8–April 18, 1982) and the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse (May 7–June 27, 1982).
2. Charles R. Beard, *A Catalogue of the Collection of Martinware Formed by Mr. Frederick John Nettlefold Together with a Short History of the Firm of R.W. Martin and Brothers of Southall* (London: privately printed by Waterlow & Sons, 1936), p. 4.
3. Frederick Nettlefold's son, Frederick John Nettlefold, inherited his father's passion for Martinware and the younger Nettlefold commissioned the monograph by Charles Beard on the Martin Brothers Pottery.
4. See: Isabelle Anscombe, "Introduction," *Boobies, Boojums and Snarks: The Ceramic Curiosities of the Martin Brothers, 1880-1914* (New York: The Jordan-Volpe Gallery, 1981).
5. See: Lionel Lambourne, *Ernest Griset: Fantasies of a Victorian Illustrator* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979).
6. See: Diana L. Johnson, *Fantastic Illustration and Design in Britain, 1850-1930* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1979).
7. Cosmo Monkhouse, "Some Original Ceramists," *The Magazine of Art,* September 1882, as quoted in Anscombe, *Boobies, Boojums and Snarks,* p. 50.

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Bird *(ca. 1890), 13¾" (34.9 cm) high, designed by Robert Wallace Martin. Collection Jordan-Volpe Gallery. Photo: John Chang McCurdy.*

Jugology

The Neurological Origins of Wheel-Thrown Pottery

Jack Troy

Before I ever saw a potter's wheel, I was aware that several human activities proceeded counterclockwise. The first was roller skating—an important socializing activity of my early teens. Once every evening the rink manager would announce "the clockwise number," and the change of habit was comically difficult for most of us. Several years later, as a member of my high-school relay team, I wondered if we would ever visit a backwoods school where track events went clockwise. We never did. (Is there a law against it, or is the unwritten law of skating rinks, tracks, and even ballrooms so strong as to need no enforcement?) Cowboys spin lariats counterclockwise, horse and automotive races go the same way, and while watching the figure-skating events of the 1980 Winter Olympics, I wasn't surprised to see the most difficult moves (death spirals and toe spins) being performed counterclockwise, without exception.

When I began to throw pots, I wasn't surprised to find the wheel turning counterclockwise. It wasn't until years later that I found that some potter's wheels in the Orient turned the opposite way—seeming to suggest a kind of Occidental-Oriental Coriolus effect. In North America, however, all motorized wheels run counterclockwise unless specially ordered. Only the Japanese Shimpo wheel, as far as I know, is "ambi-circular." At some point in the development of pottery-making, the use of a wheel spinning counterclockwise came to be preferred by the vast majority of the world's potters.

Throwing on the potter's wheel is a highly formulaic activity, commencing with centering a mass of clay, opening its center with the thumbs or fingers, and progressing toward a finished form by stretching the clay walls sequentially. Once centered and opened, the clay assumes a basic U shape unless a plate is being thrown. The inner wall of the form becomes the "territory" of the left hand, while the outer surface is governed by the right.

The action of the left hand is centrifugal, tending to stretch the clay out from the axis of the wheel; the right hand functions centripetally, pushing inward. Clay, the plastic medium that documents the interaction of these opposing forces, progresses from a solid mass to a hollow, concave, or flat form.

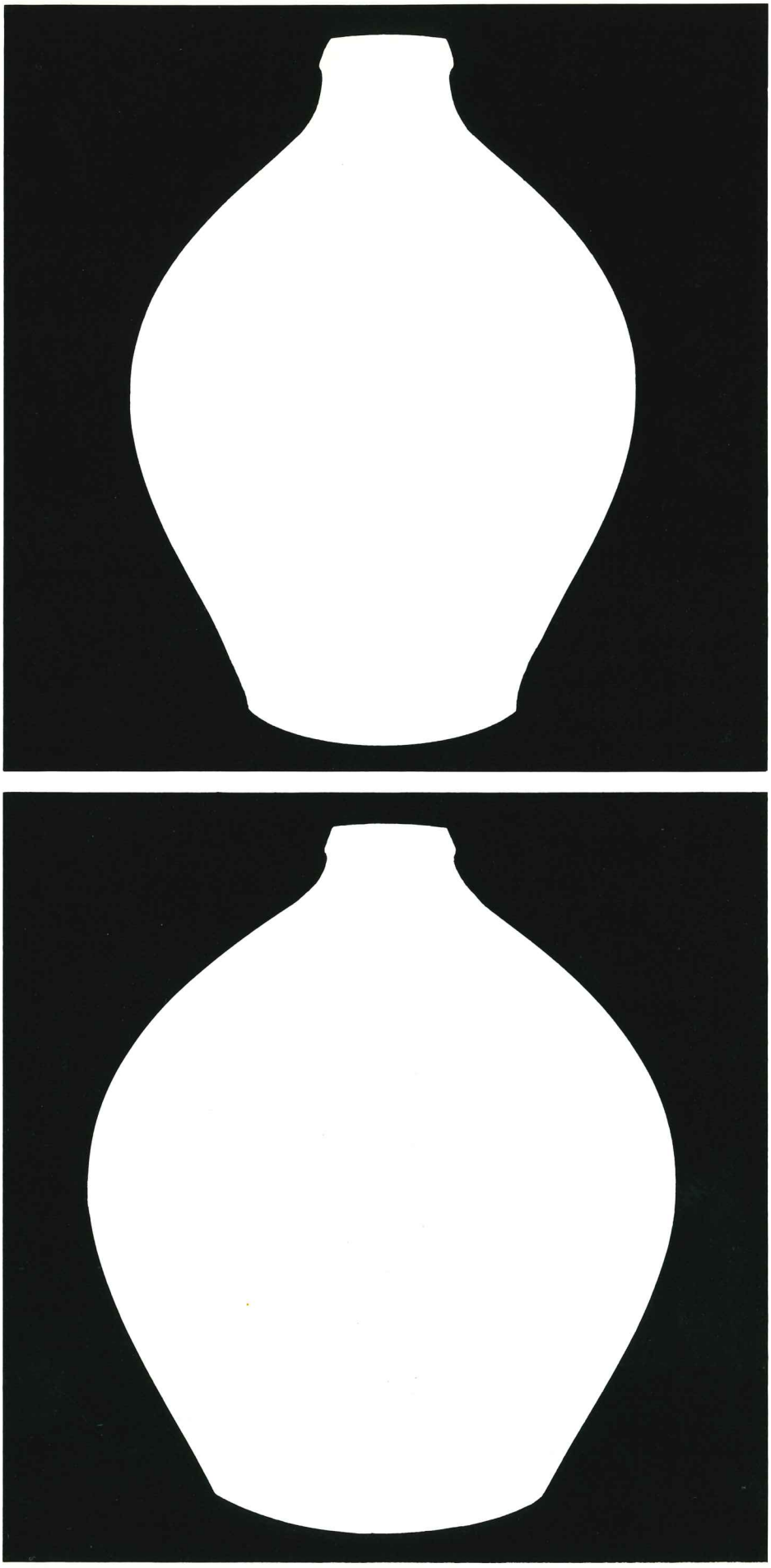
In the course of throwing, the potter's consciousness is functioning in a highly focused manner, very much like that of a musician, as we shall see. Since the potter's left hand is always *within* the U-shaped vessel, in contact with its inner wall, that surface will respond to impulses originating in the brain's right hemisphere, because of the well-known phenomenon of neurological "crossover."[1] The outer wall is subject to the right hand and left hemisphere, just as a guitar player's right hand shapes and defines a melody sequentially, while the left forms chords by changing the length and spatial relationship of the strings. Well-thrown pots and well-played compositions both result from the precise synthesis of musculature, nerve-impulse transmission, and hemispherical coordination.

Interestingly enough, researchers at Langley-Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute and California Institute of Technology have learned that the brain's hemispheres appear to be specialized with regard to function.[2] In ninety percent of right-handed human subjects, for example, the left hemisphere of the cerebral cortex contains the centers for speech.[3] Mathematical, analytical, and rational modes of thought originate there as well. The right hemisphere appears to be the locus of our sense of spatial relationships (such as the ability to solve mazes), recognition of faces and melodies, artistic motivation, and holistic, as opposed to analytical, functions. Intuitive modes of thought appear to originate in the right lobe, while rational perceptions come from the left.[4] The hemispheres are joined by a complex network of fibers, the corpus callosum, which helps coordinate the dissimilar functions of each lobe.

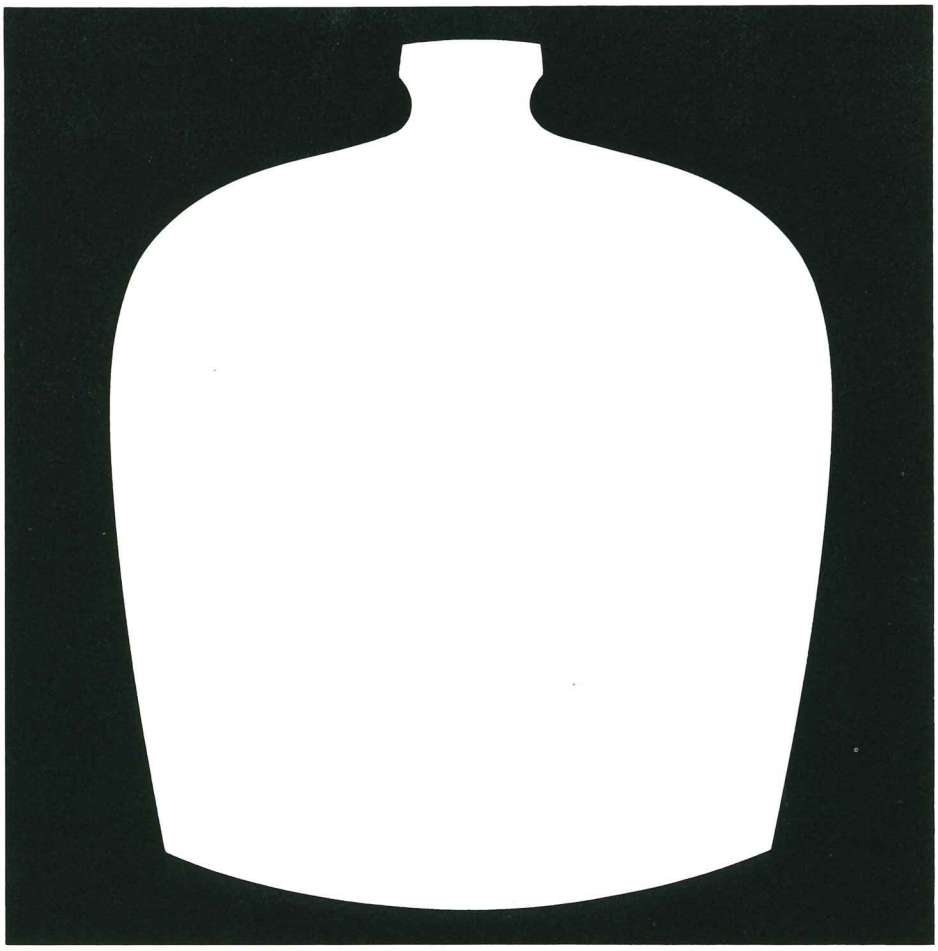
While teaching a pottery workshop at the University of California at Santa Cruz, I began thinking out loud about what I'd read, and a discussion grew out of the implications of these comparatively new findings and the process of throwing on the potter's wheel. Since then, additional readings and discussions with potters have helped me develop increased awareness about why pots look the way they do.

When centered clay is opened, on its way to refinement into a completed object, the inner and outer surfaces are manipulated according to the potter's sense of design. For example, if a plate is thrown, the inner (left hand–right hemisphere) surface of the clay becomes visually dominant in the final product, while the outer surface is subverted. Narrow cylinders present the opposite effect. Deep bowls are a compromise, presenting inner and outer surfaces to view simultaneously. Globular and spherical forms represent an interplay of both hemispheres, each being alternately dominant and submissive during the forming process.

I once heard the British potter Michael Cardew refer to the left hand as the "heart" hand in throwing, since it expands the clay wall from within, creating its sense of fullness and vitality. Cardew felt this was appropriate because the left arm is closer to the heart. This poetic connection makes sense in light of the hypothesis that



The evolution of jug forms produced at the Norton Kilns in Bennington, Vermont: pre-1823, 1844–47, 1861–81, 1886–94. Adapted from Cornelius Osgood.



our right hemispheres are the seat of spatial relationships. The left hand is most assertive in making bowls and voluminous, expansive, enclosed forms. It is least assertive in making cylindrical shapes. The more angular a form, the more it would appear to owe to the rational, mathematically oriented left lobe of the brain.

Those of us who throw pots on a consistent basis often have favorite forms on which we may work countless variations, as if certain patterns of neurological activity were pleasing in themselves. Our pots, then, might be regarded as three-dimensional "mind-prints," reflecting subtle interactions between right and left hemispheres during the throwing process, controlled by the potter's sense of "rightness" or "wrongness" about a particular proportion. This awareness, or "feeling for forms," appears to reside in the brain's right hemisphere.[5]

It is not my purpose here to speculate to what degree pots may reflect hemispherical dominance in an individual, but it would appear that a lesion or other brain damage in a potter's right hemisphere could be devastating to one's career, inasmuch as the sense of proportion located there could be impaired. (Theoretically, in such a case, the capacity to perform glaze calculations, or to write about ceramics—functions of the left hemisphere—might remain intact, if this is any consolation.)

The interplay of these functional differences is apt to manifest itself in a variety of thrown pottery forms. A case in point concerns the well-documented evolution in the forms of stoneware jugs and crocks made in the northeastern United States during the nineteenth century. After about 1850, the pottery industry changed radically as mechanized processes altered hand-throwing methods. Interestingly, the transitions in jugs and crocks reflect changing times and values, corresponding to a shift in cerebral emphasis in the throwing process itself.

Jugs, especially those made prior to the 1820s, are apt to be bulbous and full-bodied. These forms exhibit a certain balance and stature indicative of an almost equal assertion of the potter's right and left hands. Made on kick or treadle wheels, these pieces owe much of their identity to potters who had an intimate contact with the rhythms of throwing. The spinning wheel was an extension of the potter's own muscle power, amplified by mechanical advantage. Its quickening or slowing resulted from his own judgments. He was the power source; his forms were an extension of his effort and his gestures. Perhaps the forms he threw were fuller or more spherical than those of the latter decades of the century because, prior to mechanization of the pottery industry, there must have been time to exercise a "feeling for form"; to call upon the judgmental powers of spatial relationships as the thick, cylindrical clay hide was stretched into a thin, bulbous skin. In this process, the left hand is gently assertive in the lower half of the form (stretching the clay out from the wheel's axis), and at a point about midway up the jug-to-be, a perfect balance occurs between right and left hands (at the point farthest from the axis) and then the right hand assumes dominance, moving the clay wall back toward center, in a gesture imbuing the piece with a feeling of robust voluminousness.

By the 1850s, many potter's wheels were run by steam power.[6] Correspondingly, jugs and crocks developed wider bases and straighter sides. (Quite possibly these forms were easier to manage on the faster wheels, where objects with a higher center of gravity would have been less stable.) Production at the Norton Kilns in Bennington, Vermont, as documented by Cornelius Osgood, demonstrates the progression from curved to angular profiles between 1800 and 1900.[7] Straight-sided jugs and crocks were easier to stack in the kiln, more stable to use, demanded fewer decisions on the part of the potter (who, presumably, could make them faster), and were better indicators of precise measure—something potters must have been faulted on, rightly or wrongly, due to lax standards of workmanship or excessive clay shrinkage.

A certain mechanical regularity distinguishes the forms from the 1850s on, as the "rational" hand dominates throwing, and the left, with its possibilities of infusing grace into otherwise rather geometric forms, serves merely a functional need—to assist in raising a vertical clay wall. The potter as production worker was replacing the potter as craftsman. The resulting standardization set the stage for the ambitious and at times baroque slip trailing and painting that flourished from the 1850s, closing out an era that saw the jug degenerate from an aesthetically vigorous, almost sculptural statement, to a mere container produced by throwers on assembly lines. The result calls to mind James Russell Lowell's line about Poe: "But the heart somehow seems all squeezed out by the mind."[8]

The phenomenon of cerebral interplay as it applies to throwing on the potter's wheel may be a basis for establishing a symbolic and even metaphorical context in which to perceive thrown pieces. Bowls, plates, and open forms display the inner surface of the clay wall; are open and receptive, admitting light to their interiors. They suggest the outstretched palm of the hand, containing, yet simultaneously offering its contents. In being formed, these pieces document the "romantic" tendency of the left hand–right hemisphere to assert themselves in centrifugal fashion, opening the compact mass of clay as a flower blooms, pushing back the outer, constraining surface of its structure.

Jugs, vases, jars, and bottles display the surface touched by the right, rationally oriented hand, the task of which is to impart control, establish structural boundaries, while giving strength to the form. Such objects are, we might say, "night pieces" in that their interiors are dark, as opposed to those of bowls. The right hand, in throwing, often holds a rib or template, to enforce a strict, disciplined shape on the clay, while removing outward signs of the material's plastic qualities.

In the light of these biological correlatives, we have another criterion by which to assess wheel-thrown ceramics. For pots that appear to be a product of mere dexterity are truly images of finely tuned, perhaps even miraculous, shaping powers of the brain.

1. Robert E. Ornstein, *The Psychology of Consciousness* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 67.
2. Carl Sagan, *The Dragons of Eden* (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 168.
3. Left-handed subjects, who comprise about five percent of the population, are more complex, often possessing "mixed dominance"—in which areas of the brain are less predictably differentiated than in right-handed persons. See: Ornstein, *The Psychology of Consciousness,* p. 68.
4. Ibid., p. 67.
5. Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), p. 118.
6. Harold F. Guilland, *Early American Folk Pottery* (Radnor, Pa.: Chilton Books, 1971), p. 54.
7. Cornelius Osgood, *The Jug and Related Stoneware of Bennington* (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1971), p. 116.
8. Scully Bradley et al., *The American Tradition in Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1957), p. 714.

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Graham Marks in his studio, Scottsville, New York (1982). Photo: Tony Casadonte.

The Fruitful Mysteries of Graham Marks

Michael McTwigan

As a child, Graham Marks wanted to be an archaeologist when he grew up. Or play the French horn (another childhood passion). As adulthood approached, he studied modern dance with Phoebe Neville and at the Martha Graham School in New York and danced with Group Motion in Philadelphia, a company formed by students of Mary Wigman (the German dance pioneer). Marks studied at the Philadelphia College of Art (BFA 1974) and at Alfred University (MFA 1976). In 1974, he took part in the restoration and reactivation of Henry Chapman Mercer's Moravian Pottery and Tileworks in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. He now teaches at the School for American Craftsmen at Rochester Institute of Technology and lives with his wife Megan, a writer, in Scottsville, New York. Marks is represented by Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia, where he will have a one-man show this fall, and his work was recently on view at Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York, and at DBR Gallery, Cleveland.

If man was to play God, he might well populate the planet with forms resembling these. Graham Marks has taken the Great Architect's task into his own hands. The result: Nature by Design. Of course, the competition between *homo faber* and Dame Nature is long standing. The aim here is not to copy nature, however, but improve on it. Unlike the I-Hsing potter, the Art Nouveau designer, or Le Corbusier, Marks is not designing with nature, but against it. With late-twentieth-century sensibilities, Graham Marks constructs what might be termed, in a Euclidian world, "natural" objects. Yet, no matter how much he draws upon nature's inventory of forms, the result is hardly natural. We might best compare him to the painter of still lifes, who arranges apples and oranges in dramatic compositions that are rarely encountered outside the studio. Pursued a bit further, this analogy is quite useful. For Marks manages to fuse the still life's usual repertoire of objects—fruit and majolica jug, for example—into one form.

This points to a crucial difference between nature and culture, between what Levi-Strauss termed the *raw* and the *cooked.* And while we may experience in nature many of the pleasures of art, it remains as *sign,* not symbol. Oranges and apples sitting on a table do not comprise art; a still life does. The world as we find it is just *there;* it means nothing. This truth is older than Plato. But when transformed by human beings, the objects of the world come to symbolize ideas, emotions, memories. Philip Rawson makes just this point in regard to ceramics, when he distinguishes between metaphor and conceit:

The essence of the metaphor is that the suggestions conveyed by the pot's inflections and forms are communicated as allusions, while the pot retains its existential identity, visibly and tactually. . . . The conceit, on the other hand, sets out to imitate a single natural object to the extent that the pot's identity and its many-dimensional symbolism may be shed in favour of one dominant analogue.[1]

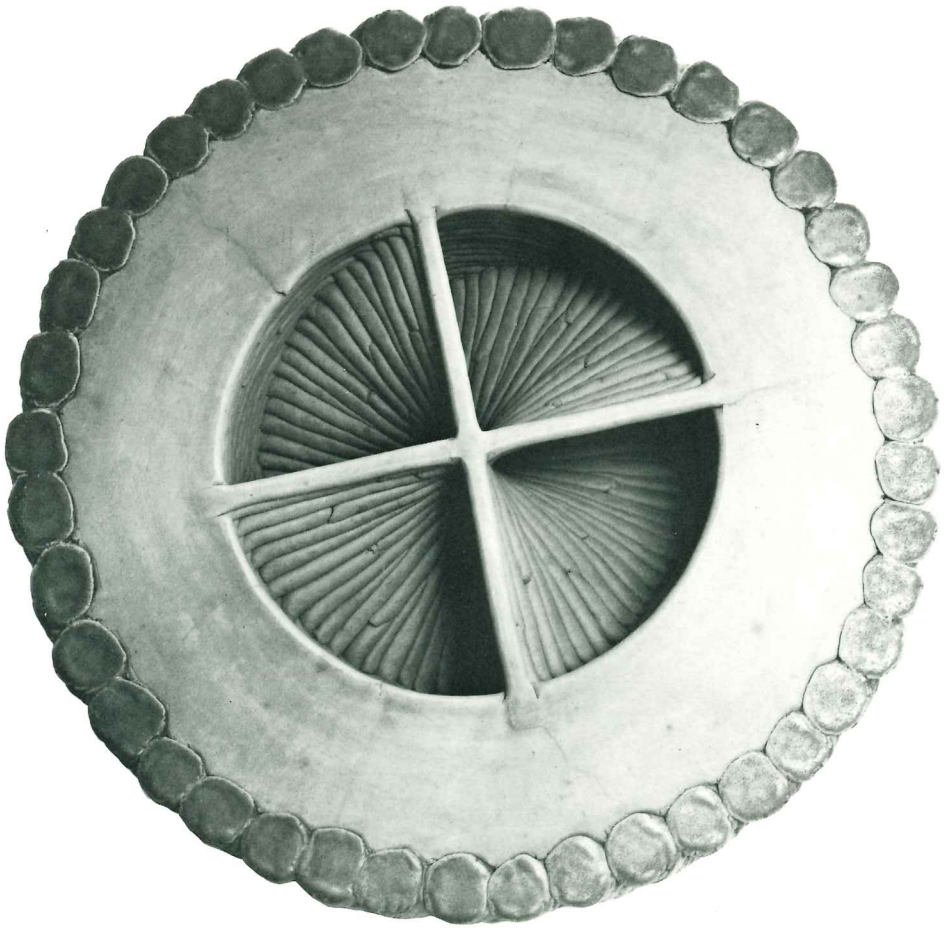
An example of a conceit is a Chelsea porcelain box:

shaped and glazed in imitation of and the same size as an apple, with a lid-handle the size and shape of a caterpillar, [it] has abdicated its pot-nature . . . it accepts the scale of the everyday world of reality in its detailing, losing the status of complex transformation image in favour of its one "amazing" conceit.[2]

Art is transformation, not imitation. And while we may never know how human beings came to make what we now call art, certainly its origins reflect not simply nature, but the human being's relationship to nature. And this relationship, like the art of language itself, called for communication—the communication of myths, beliefs, history, skills, and more. How does Graham Marks address this task? Let's consider six works here.

Examining first the Celestial Forms (my designation), we find three sculptures about twenty-nine inches in diameter, with turquoise blue skin and earthenware red flesh. They resemble huge melons or gourds sliced in half. Each is more complex than the next. The first has parallel ridges running along its wrinkled skin, and has been sliced cleanly to reveal its inner flesh. Our associations with forms of the vegetable kingdom are strongest in this piece. But its central orifice of spiraling coils divided into quadrants, its large size, and its blue glaze (triggering in the memory centuries of Near and Far Eastern pottery), rule out the possibility that it is a found object.

The second of the three has a thicker skin—a spiraling rind formed by blue coils one and one-half inches thick. This spiral pattern, coupled with the fact that the blue coils retain their skin even along the "sliced" face, lead us to suspect some artificer has had a hand in its making. The last of the Celestial Forms confirms our hunch, for here the blue coils, three layers deep, zigzag over its surface in geometric regularity. We know we are in the realm of imaginary beings, of make-believe. We notice other tell-tale evidence. In relation to the natural objects to which they allude, their larger-than-life scale makes us feel a bit like Alice in Wonderland. The artist reinforces this perception by placing them on pedestals, which affects us in two ways. They sit in perfect repose; stable, solid, like boulders at rest. Yet they are round and may roll at any moment. We are impressed by their serene balance, yet somewhat anxious lest this equanimity be only momentary. Earthly gravity, too, is defied. For they tilt up at us in an agile stance



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that belies their great weight.
By placing them on pedestals, the artist avers: no matter how familiar, these objects did not fall to earth like apples from a tree. Independent of us and of nature, their uneasy equilibrium, mass, and large scale have the desired effect: we are humbled. This is appropriate for the Celestial Forms.
But the three Earthly Forms seem out of place in the exalted, white environment of a gallery. Like Lucio Fontana's clay spheres or Isamu Noguchi's chiseled rocks, these would rest more comfortably outdoors, directly on the ground. If the Celestial Forms are of the vegetable kingdom, the Earthly Forms are members of the animal kingdom. They seem to have been broken open, not cut neatly with a knife. Earthy, dark brown, and rough, they look weathered and old.
While the blue forms appeal to our imagination, these fecund bodies stir responses in our own body. For example, the red form resembles a bottom viewed from the rear; another has the shapely curve of a woman's breast; and the exterior of the third Earthly Form corresponds to a mass of wriggling intestines or serpents.
Most art aims either toward the earth or toward the stars. It is either raw, sensual, and irrational—striving toward nature—or it is refined, spiritual, and rational—striving toward the realm of Plato's presumed essences. The two tendencies are so opposed, they rarely coincide.
Graham Marks manages it, with an economy that nearly hides the work's actual complexity. For as we approach these spheres, we don't expect more than their skins or hides promise. Coming closer we realize these are not wholes, but halves—cut or broken open. Will they reveal a vessel's inner volume, a melon's orange red flesh? Their easy resemblance to natural objects is misleading, and we are surprised when confronted by their rotating cores, which spiral to a terminus we can only guess at. Graham Marks reveals one mystery only to leave us at the doorstep of another. His art is the better for it. Much as a rose is more beautiful when partly open, these forms stir the imagination by their secrecy and ambiguity.

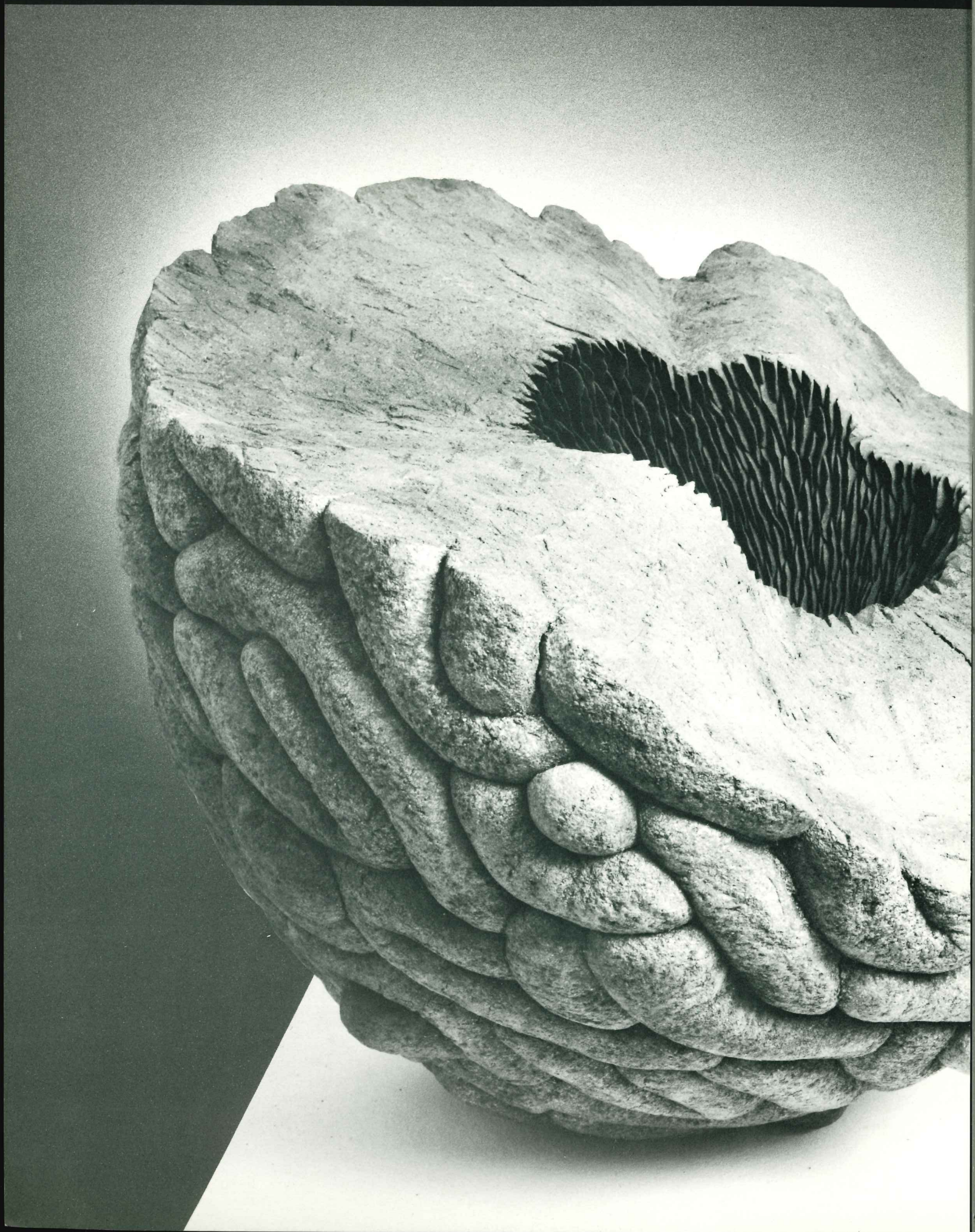
1. Philip Rawson, *The Appreciation of the Arts: Ceramics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 189.
2. Ibid.

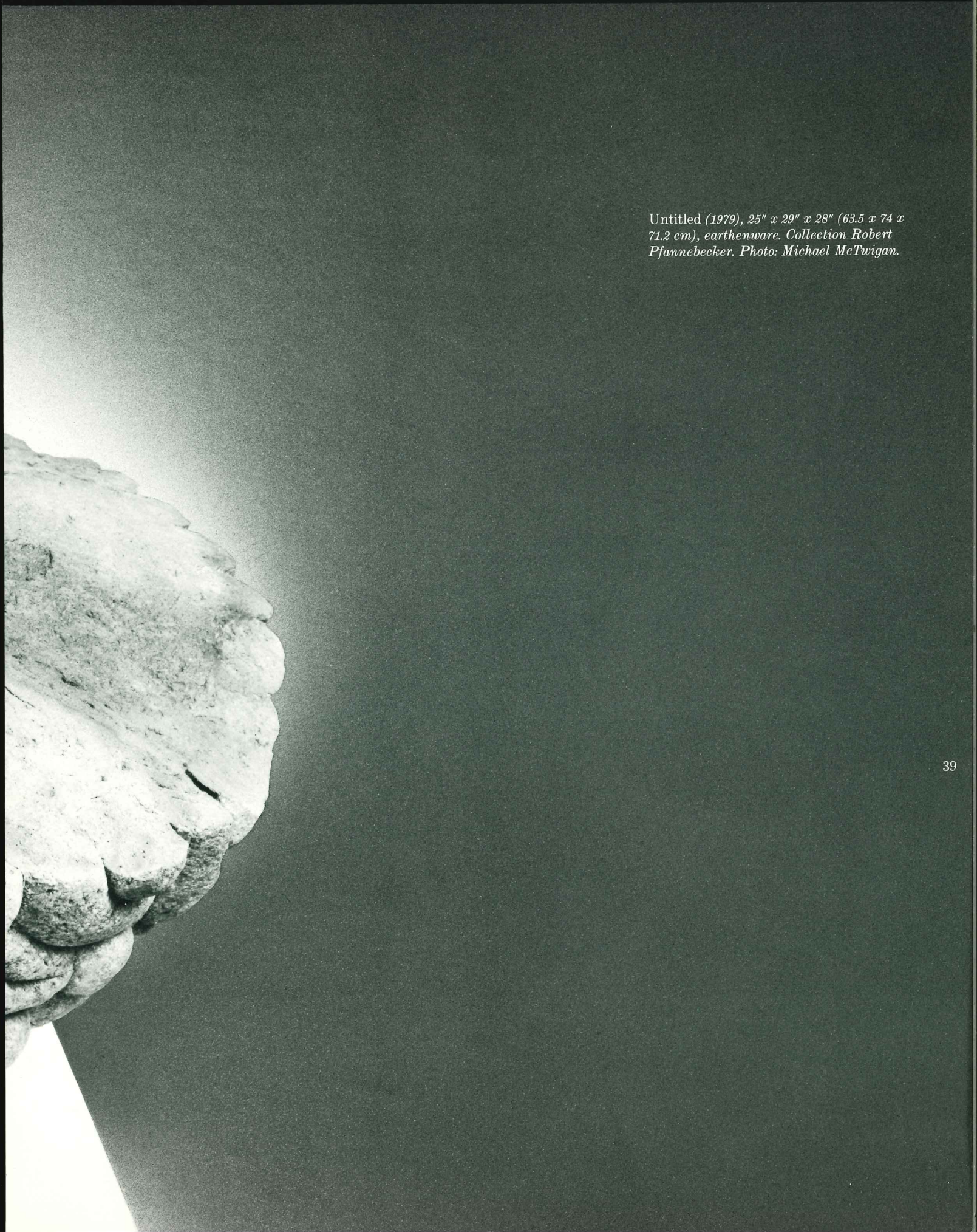
(Detail) Untitled *(1979), 33″ x 29″ x 31″ (84 x 74 x 79 cm), earthenware. Collection of the Lannan Foundation. Photo: Michael McTwigan.*

(Above) Untitled *(1979), 31″ x 27″ x 32″ (79 x 67 x 81 cm), earthenware. Collection Dr. and Mrs. Jay Cooper. Photo: Jerry Schmidt.*

PORTFOLIO

Two views of Untitled *(1979), 33″ x 29½″ x 33″ (84 x 75 x 84 cm), earthenware. Collection William Harper. Courtesy Helen Drutt Gallery. Photos: Michael McTwigan and Jerry Schmidt.*





Untitled *(1979), 25" x 29" x 28" (63.5 x 74 x 71.2 cm), earthenware. Collection Robert Pfannebecker. Photo: Michael McTwigan.*

Glen Lukens

Pioneer of the Vessel Aesthetic **Elaine Levin**

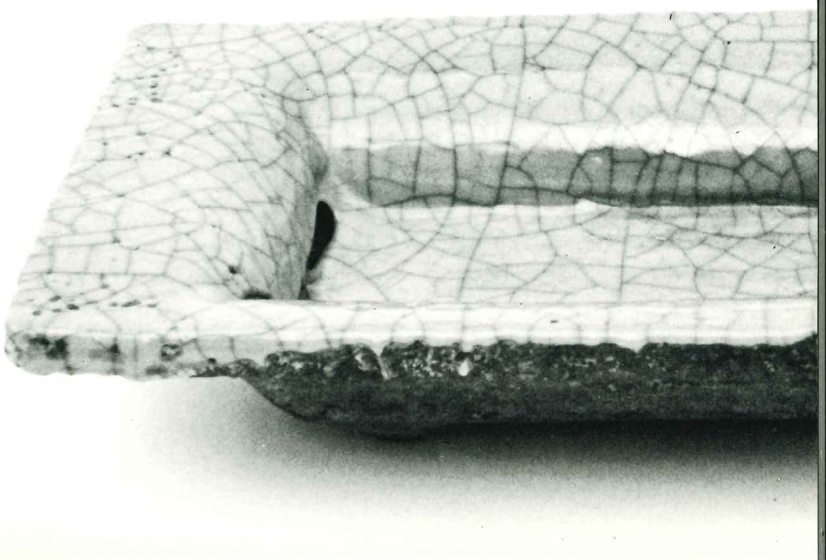
He did not throw well on the wheel; he made most of his pottery in press molds. He did not give glaze formulas to his students; he personally sprayed each pot with the student's choice of a glaze. He did not depend on ceramic-supply companies; he searched the deserts and mountains of the Southwest for raw materials. A ceramist and teacher, Glen Lukens followed his instincts along a path that brought him recognition for innovative pottery and glass, work that reflected the ambience of the Southwest. His emotional, intuitive approach to the material foreshadowed the philosophy of the next generation of studio potters.

A chance encounter with a striking glaze led Lukens to an obsession—a search for the secret of Egyptian blue glaze. On a visit to the Walker Art Gallery in Minneapolis in the 1920s, he noticed a small, ancient Egyptian figure so brilliantly glazed, he could vividly recall the incident many years later:

I decided there and then I wanted to make a blue as good as that . . . I didn't want to copy it; I wanted a blue as beautiful as that Egyptian blue.[1]

In 1924, he left his teaching job in Minnesota for positions with a high school and junior college in Fullerton, a small community east of Los Angeles. There he began his glaze experiments in earnest, searching for that elusive blue. At the time, there were few sources of information; he had to find it through his own experiments. One summer, while teaching a class at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, a friend introduced him to a nearby technical library. The books he consulted there led him to Death Valley. He felt confident that simulating Egyptian, desert-derived, self-glazing clay was the right direction, but his experiments were unsuccessful. He planned his next vacation at London's British Museum, whose collections included the Egyptian *Book of the Dead.* Subsequent experiments with beads of clay containing copper resulted in the bright blue he was seeking, and newspaper accounts of his discovery brought public attention,[2] including an offer to teach evening classes at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. Lukens's ceramics and jewelry classes there boosted enrollment, and by 1933, at the age of forty-six, he established and became chairman of the new ceramics department at the university.[3]

Attracting students to a new program in the midst of the Depression required ingenuity. Lukens found himself appealing to local ceramics factories for equipment donations, while tailoring the curriculum to students from a variety of departments. Unlike programs established earlier at Alfred University, New York, and Ohio State University, where courses were integrated with ceramic engineering, the classes at USC were within the School of



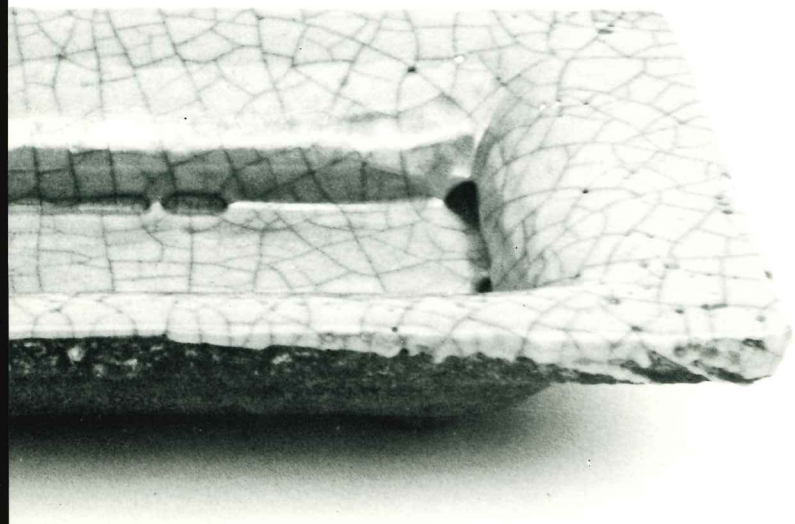
Architecture. Art and education majors enrolled to expand their skills, while architecture students came to work with a three-dimensional material,[4] and dentistry students used clay to improve their manual dexterity. In order to broaden enrollment and to interest the public, Lukens took his show on the road, demonstrating and lecturing to high schools and clubs—an embryonic form of what later would be called a "workshop."[5] Scheduling projects for such an assortment of students was less of a problem than formulating a workable clay body from California materials. With no manuals to consult, no published articles or books by earlier Western potters, the small body of information Lukens had collected during his years at Fullerton served only as the basis for further research. Lukens was never taught the scientific method; he and his students worked on an intuitive level to produce a pliable clay body:

The student would start with this raw, useless clay, then blend it with a little silica, a little talc. You see we worked empirically . . . we did it from an emotional level; the intellect guided us, but it was not the work of the intellect. It was the deep self coming up, penetrating the surface consciousness, just as surrealist people paint.[6]

Lukens allowed material to guide his research and personal expression, a way of working that anticipated the style of Peter Voulkos and his students some twenty years later.
Scientific guidance came from a ceramic engineer, Tom Curtis, who came from the East Coast to perfect clay bodies for Gladding McBean, a clay-products manufacturing company. He also taught a class at the university, and through the efforts of himself and others, developed a low-fire, white clay body, high in talc. This was significant because most tile companies in California had converted to the manufacture of dinnerware by 1934, as the Depression had reduced construction and the need for architectural tile. The white talc body enhanced glaze colors, and California soon became known for inexpensive dinnerware glazed in sun-bright hues.
Lukens found this clay effective under his turquoise blue and bright yellow glazes, which were his standards by the early thirties. Soon he expanded his color range to include a uranium orange and a crimson, brilliant and clear over the white clay. However, he never liked the white color and would stain exposed clay (usually around the base and foot) a dark shade. Lukens preferred a buff clay with grog, whose surface he covered with a white slip to duplicate the effect afforded by the white clay body. The translucent, colored glazes he sprayed over this buff clay tended to develop a crackle, which he emphasized by rubbing in stains or pouring on a contrasting glaze, wiping it off, and refiring.[7]
Lukens's thick-walled, press-molded bowls and plates (he utilized a treadle wheel, which was awkward for throwing, primarily for trimming[8]) presented the vessel form simplified to its essence, a sharp contrast to the fussy pottery characteristic of the period. The latter was generally slip-cast porcelain, thin-walled, delicate, glazed in soft celadons or other muted colors. Frequently, the vessel's base was contoured into three ornately carved feet, similar to Chinese pottery, the model of the day. Lukens was interested in historical ware, but he was not a scholar and his curiosity extended only to past techniques that served his present needs. For inspiration he looked to American sources, as a writer of the period observed:

He succeeded in imparting to his pottery the gracious, vivid and romantic atmosphere of the Southwest, which we think of as Indian or Spanish, yet is of today.[9]

Glen Lukens likewise encouraged individual expression in others. In an article written in 1934, he noted that the crafts exhibited at the Los Angeles County Fair (one of the few showcases available to craftspeople in Southern California) displayed little change from the previous ten years, even though plates with "pie crust" edges were no longer in evidence.[10] He cautioned that imitation of past forms should only be used to develop an art vocabulary, and urged craftspeople to adapt to changing modes and manners. "There is still too much tradition and imitation in the work of our craftsmen," Lukens admonished, going on to say that this will disappear only when craftspeople "realize that individual feeling, thought, and spirit are the only true sources for craft production."[11]
In 1936, the Fifth National Ceramic Exhibition at the Syracuse Museum recognized his singular path by awarding him first prize. This marked the first time a California ceramist had been honored in any national exhibit, and in a sense it legitimized and brought California work to the attention of a larger public. The following year, Lukens was invited to represent the West Coast at the Paris International Exhibition.
The award also brought requests for articles; in one, Lukens wrote of growing up in rural Missouri, and observed that he was making pottery out of the same clay his father plowed to grow corn.[12] He saw his attraction to the Southwest and the Pueblo Indians as stemming from a similarity to his early life on the farm and "the never-ending battle with the elements."[13] This affinity was reinforced by writer Mary Austin, whom he met in Sante Fe, New Mexico. She introduced him to Indian culture and values, and to a



Glen Lukens with Arabian Black Luster Vase *(1947).*

Plate *(n.d.), 16" x 7¼" (40.6 x 18.4 cm). Courtesy California State University, Los Angeles. Photo: Jeffrey L. Levin.*

people who for centuries trained the conscious mind so that what they now do is instinctive.[14] Lukens admired the pottery of Maria Martinez, and owned one of her bowls. He wrote about using pine knots to experimentally smoke pots, as the Pueblo Indians did.
Reginald Poland, Director of the Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego, organized the first all-California ceramics exhibition in 1938. Lukens wrote the foreword and preface to the catalogue and acted as juror. Fifty-three ceramists participated, showing 111 objects. Laura Andreson, then teaching at the University of California, Los Angeles, exhibited seven bowls and vases. Lukens displayed nine of his own plates and bowls. Ceramic sculpture, a significant development since the late 1920s, was also represented, and the show was considered a landmark. As one reviewer wrote: "This exhibition means that the Pacific Coast ceramic child is able to walk alone."[15]
During this period, certain elements within Lukens's work became more pronounced. Flowing, crackle glazes dominated much of his ware. Long before other potters saw the beauty in a glaze that dripped or pooled, Lukens reveled in it, comparing it to phenomena in nature:

I used to watch lightning across the sky and think, if we could control that lightning, it wouldn't be beautiful anymore.[16]

Lukens also felt unglazed clay was a surface too attractive to be totally submerged under glaze. He began to confine glaze areas to grooves cut into the broad rim of his plates, creating concentric circles or a spiral; he allowed some glazes to pool in the bottom of wide bowls, contrasting their smooth surface with a heavily grogged and tooled clay body. Accenting a clay surface even further, he took thick wads of clay and pressed them into a mold with a rough surface. The earthy configuration of the vessel's outer surface could not be seen until the object was stiff enough to be removed from the mold, a form his students named "Guess What."[17] Before the term "organic" became associated with a type of pottery, Lukens's ware defined the word.
This organic predilection took Lukens to the boundary line of function. His forms never quite abandoned the realm of containers, but some features of his ware (dark earthy clay, pooled glazes with unexpected colors beneath the surface) had little to do with function and much to do with aesthetic ideas—manifestations of his sensitivity to materials and the environment from which they came.
Many people did not understand the concepts guiding his forms. One visitor seeing his work at the San Francisco World's Fair of 1939, wrote unflatteringly that his big bowls with "juicy" glazes looked as though Gargantua had made them—an observation Lukens considered a tribute to his spontaneity.[18] A set of bowls decorated with a glaze Lukens named "Windrift" (it reminded him of wind-blown snow) received such favorable comments he gave names to all his other favorite glazes: Death Valley Yellow, Mesa Blue, Mojave Golden Amber, Arabian Black Luster.[19]
As one decade ended and another began, Lukens received further acclaim; in 1939, an honorary doctorate from Oregon State University, where he received his undergraduate degree in education (and in the process discovered a ceramics class in the basement of the Mines building). In 1941, the Design Awards presented by Lord & Taylor honored him and three others. Lukens was credited with being "largely responsible for the exceptional pottery being produced in the Southwest" by encouraging his students to become professional potters.[20] The prestigious Charles Fergus Binns award, presented to him in 1949, honored his achievements in "art ceramics" in the West.
America's entry into World War II presented new challenges to ceramics. Lukens and his students, with the encouragement of the War Relocation Authority, researched clay bodies that would withstand extremes of heat and cold, to replace metal pots and pans. "Clay and the War Effort," an exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum, displayed student-made skillets, baking pots and pans, and snack jars of heavy terra cotta—an application of the arts to the exigencies of war.[21]

When the University of Southern California initiated a four-year program in occupational therapy, Lukens offered a six-week course to therapists on the use of clay. The venerable treadle wheel with which Lukens had helped veterans with physical and mental problems under the aegis of Curative Workshops after the First World War, once again was put to work. When the war ended, Lukens prepared for a resurgence of American art:

The environmental stimuli that condition social or economic attitudes should be allowed to affect our art and enable it to become as robust as other expressions of American culture.[22]

Before he could personally witness the return of veterans to the colleges, and especially to craft classes, he took a leave of absence to become a technical adviser in Haiti. Under the auspices of the Inter-American Educational Council, he worked at a center in Port-au-Prince, teaching clay techniques to teachers and unskilled youngsters. Since pottery wasn't a part of Haitian culture before his arrival, he faced the familiar task of finding a suitable clay from native materials. He also had to reverse the native custom of using gourds as bowls, an unsanitary practice that helped spread disease. Using the gourd as a mold, he made it the basis for forming simple pots; the press-molded bowl with a coil handle became a cup, and with a spout it became a pitcher. Native woods served as trimming tools, and vines substituted for sponges.
The generous spirit of a people coping with extreme poverty inspired his dedication, and he returned to Los Angeles with a plan for developing small home industries in impoverished rural areas. UNESCO accepted his proposal and he returned to Haiti in the summer of 1951 to set up a ceramics center in Marbial, where soil erosion from hurricanes had made farming impossible. Marbial pottery was bartered for food, as well as made to serve household needs.[23] For this project he had equipment from California, as well as financial support from the newly organized Design Division of the American Ceramic Society. At his request, Vivika Heino (his teaching assistant in 1939) took over his classes. He returned briefly to California in 1954, leaving again for Haiti the following year, because:

If I stay here, all I can do is turn out more pottery and glassware. But over there I can help people who sorely need it, to raise their standard of living—even if it's only a little.[24]

His last trip in 1955 was sponsored and paid for by the Haitian government. One measure of his success was the number of orders from Port-au-Prince hotels for the ceramics produced by that city's Centre de Céramique; another was the decrease in disease due to the substitution of clay utensils for gourds. Unlike others who introduced crafts to Third World countries, Lukens did not impose his concept of design or decoration on what was produced, but sought instead to help his students find their own way with materials and techniques.[25]
During his absence from California, ceramics had changed. Stoneware clays discovered in the West in the 1940s came into general use, pushing earthenware into the background. Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada's visits to the West Coast in the early fifties introduced muted colors, earthtones, and wax-resist designs that became the style. Lukens said he felt like Rip Van Winkle in a world where potters had suddenly begun using potter's wheels and an unfamiliar clay body, and had obliterated color. His arthritis, held at bay in tropical Haiti, returned to plague him.
The familiar figure in the blue smock with a rope tied around his waist retired from the university and returned to working with glass, an intermittent interest since 1935. In the late thirties, he had evolved a method of slumping a sheet of glass over heavily grogged clay: he placed stained cathedral or Mexican glass on bisqued forms in a low-fire kiln, where it melted into the clay shape, giving the underside of glass a bubbled texture. Over a number of years, Lukens improved on this procedure, developing a wide range of colors. Some of the stains he used in glazes also

colored his glass, often mixed with a flux and applied with a palette knife. Japanese flower arrangements, then a popular home decoration, required large, flat plates, which Lukens formed in glass as the base for dried branches, a sparse grouping of beach stones, and driftwood. Utilizing scrap materials before they became stylish, he collected colored glass bottles and incorporated bits and pieces of them into panels for screens and hanging lights. Glass opened a new area for service, and at the age of 73, he traveled to Jackson State College in Mississippi to teach these skills. His Haitian experience had trained him to work with few resources and to improvise. When that venture ended, he was asked by the Peace Corps to discuss conditions in Haiti with groups of new volunteers. Until his death in 1967 at the age of 80, he remained active, continuing his research in glass and glazes, and writing magazine articles.

"Natural," "spontaneous," and "intuitive" are terms we associate with Peter Voulkos and the clay revolution of the late 1950s, yet these words apply equally to Glen Lukens. He gave the vessel greater scope, and in doing so provided a philosophical and material basis for change. In 1939, shortly after their arrival in California from Austria, Otto and Gertrud Natzler met Lukens. Otto's observation of Glen Lukens was shared by many:

He was what you call today a natural—going toward what he believed was right. . . . He was very convincing and very much in love with the medium. You could feel it. . . . He could talk about it in an interesting way without being sophisticated. You really felt his joy.[26]

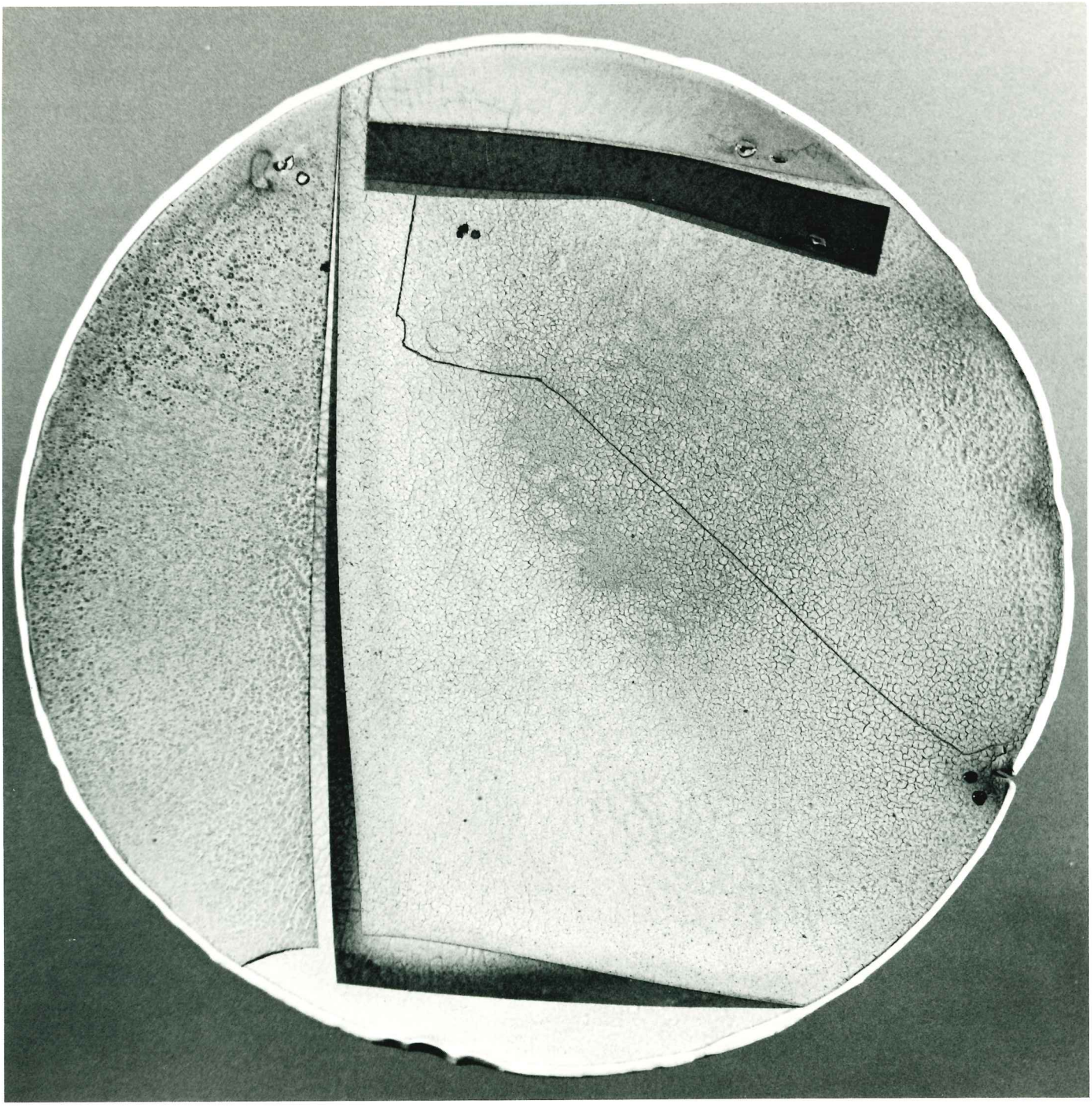
1. Interview with Glen Lukens by Hazel Bray, 1966, p. 10.
2. Glen Lukens, "The New Handcraftsman," *California Arts and Architecture* 46 (December 1934), p. 13.
3. Margaret Kraus, "Ceramics—The Art of Creative Adventure," *USC Alumni Review,* May 1937, p. 6.
4. Bray, p. 15.
5. Ibid., p. 5.
6. Ibid., p. 6.
7. Interview with Russell Congialosi by Elaine Levin, 1979, p. 2.
8. Carlton Ball, "Glen Lukens," speech delivered at Oregon State University, June 1980, p. 5.
9. A. A. R. "Ceramics of West Coast Clays," *The Christian Science Monitor,* June 22, 1935, p. 7.
10. Lukens, "The New Handcraftsmen," p. 13.
11. Ibid., p. 13.
12. Glen Lukens, "The New Craftsman," *Design* 38 (November 1936), p. 39.
13. Ibid., p. 39.
14. Ibid., p. 39.
15. "First California Ceramic Exhibit," *Bulletin of the American Ceramic Society* 17 (April 1938), p. 194.
16. Bray, p. 36.
17. Ibid., p. 33.
18. Ibid., p. 19.
19. Ibid., p. 22.
20. "Four Receive Design Awards," *New York Sun,* April 29, 1941.
21. "News and Comments: Pots and Pans," *Magazine of Art* 36 (November 1943), p. 275.
22. Glen Lukens, "American Ceramics—Worth Working and Fighting For," *Craft Horizons* 5 (February 1946), p. 11.
23. Glen Lukens, "Ceramics in Haiti," *Ceramic Age* 59 (May 1952), p. 66.
24. Arthur Miller, "Haiti Beckons Lukens Again," *Los Angeles Times,* April 10, 1955, part 4, p. 6.
25. Interview with Vivika Heino by Elaine Levin, 1981.
26. Interview with Otto Natzler by Elaine Levin, 1979.

Elaine Levin was guest curator of the exhibition, "Glen Lukens: Pioneer of the Vessel Aesthetic," held at the Fine Arts Gallery of California State University, Los Angeles (January 4–February 11, 1982). The show was funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Her article appeared in different form in that exhibition's catalogue.

(Top) Plate *(n.d.). Courtesy California State University, Los Angeles. Photo: Emil Cuhel.*

Plate, Ash Tray, and Vase *(1938). Photo in collection of Vera O'Dell. Courtesy California State University, Los Angeles.*

Exhibitions



Untitled (Laki's eyes gleamed red and green) *(1981), 20″ (50.8 cm) diameter, slip-cast clay. Courtesy Triton College Fine Arts Gallery. Photo: Truusy Lory.*

Robert McGowan

Janet Koplos

A frequent criticism of today's "craft" art is that it lacks the intellectual approach, the theory, that would make it "fine" art. Of course, theory and art are *not* equivalents. But it is true that a great deal of work in clay (and other "craft" media) is casually or intuitively made, without conscious control of sources or meanings of the imagery, without an understanding of where the work fits into the pattern of today's art, or of how it rejects that pattern. Certainly there have been primitives who have made great art, but today's art tends to be sophisticated and highly conscious of its goals and its means.

So is Robert McGowan. His circular wall pieces were accompanied here by an abstruse statement that may baffle half the people who read it, but which reveals an acute self-awareness.

He writes: "A motivating factor of pervading fundamental importance is a strong personal affinity for the extremes of two unequivocally opposing qualities: sensuous casualness on the one hand, and structured orderliness on the other." One sees order in the unvarying size and shape of the works, and in their formalist compositions. They differ from each other in careful increments of color and arrangement, subtle differences suggesting intense concentration.

That concentration communicates itself in an almost physical way. The dry surfaces and mostly matte colors do not particularly tempt our fingers to touch. Instead, our attention is riveted to hard-edged slices of color, an off-center vertical axis, and a series of truncated bands across the top. These fields and lines of color are so tightly constructed, they rebound against the eye in the way a plucked string rebounds against the ear.

Where in this tense physicality, then, is the "sensuous casualness" McGowan wants? It's there in the idiosyncrasies of the cast and altered forms, in the changed perspectives of their concave surfaces, in the nongeometric asymmetry of their compositions. Hard colors are pushed to the edges; large areas of softly modulating color are pierced by single incisions that force an awareness of part to part, color to color, line to line.

McGowan's works are more sensuous than casual. While they are bent, incised, and occasionally punctured, like Peter Voulkos's plates, his compositions are more exploratory, gentle, quietly intense. They are neither spontaneous nor loose.

They are also not, as I had supposed, very close to Margie Hughto's *Fans,* except for the importance of color. The more appropriate comparison is to the paintings of Richard Diebenkorn, and perhaps to the shadow-forms of Ellsworth Kelly. In looking at their paintings, we see not only abstract color forms, but known shapes—landscape configurations or cast shadows, for example. They refer to something real and known, if not immediately recognizable.

I have that same feeling with McGowan's work. I sometimes see in them corners of rooms or ledges of window sills; at other times, I see aerial views of landforms. In other words, they can be intimate or infinite. They are puzzles of the picture plane, asking what advances and what recedes in space, sometimes alluding to a great depth. That's another reason we have so little urge to touch them: where they refer to vast, mysterious spaces, they are like paintings—they are illusions rather than objects.

There is a tension between picture plane and vessel form. The curved surfaces are like shaped canvases; concavity contributes to the complex illusion of depth. McGowan's habit of forcing the strong colors up under the lip at the top of the composition draws us into their space. If McGowan had made these completely flat, they could be discussed in painting terms alone, but he retains the concavity of the vessel and thereby refers to the object itself. I suppose that makes him unclassifiable to the art world, which always categorizes everything, but to me this makes for a kind of wholeness.

McGowan does not title his works, but offers strange subtitles in their place: *Floating sixteen eggs,* or *Too cold any night/ on being Hrimfaxi,* or *That's the way the sky feels, Rachel.* I'm unable to find a direct correlation between these words and the works they signify. They could be a put-on, but refusing to name one's art more likely reflects the artist's wish not to limit his viewers' flights of fancy. These subtitles don't give anything away, but stir our curiosity and cause us to look again. In keeping with the introspective nature of McGowan's art, they could be records of his state of mind. I find them disturbing and hard to forget, yet not indelibly unified with the works they identify.

The work reviewed here was on view at Triton College Fine Arts Gallery, River Grove, Illinois (November 9–30, 1981). Subsequently, McGowan's ceramics were exhibited at Union Street Gallery, San Francisco (March 4–April 4, 1982).

Janet Koplos is a freelance critic and crafts editor of the New Art Examiner.

Paul Soldner

Joanne Burstein

A recent show of Paul Soldner's work served as graphic reminder of the unique combination of raw energy and refined technique, iconoclasm and caring that mark the man as seminal to two generations of ceramists. Soldner's attitude toward clay and its processes bridged Japanese aesthetic and presence with American ingenuity and vigor.

Soldner's personal impulse for expanded consciousness through the process of creating, distinct from successfully achieving a preconceived goal, did much to free clay from its functional tradition. Two decades ago, with typical directness, he took the Japanese method of raku as his own. He developed the reduction technique that, by now, is the only definition of raku most non-Japanese know. The qualities of accident and immediacy inherent to the raku process have allowed Soldner to express the rightness of the moment in combination with his more painterly concerns for image, color, and texture.

The pedestal pieces seen here (twelve to twenty inches tall) combine wheel-thrown bases with battered and torn sections of slab clay, which overlap and bend back upon themselves, juxtaposing smooth finish with flowing Baroque exuberance. They retain an intimacy of scale often rejected by younger artists and achieve their power through the compressed energy of rugged clay and overlays of surface design. The surfaces of these and the wall plaques (two to three feet wide) are the layered textures of burlap, tire tread, figurative plywood stencils, and who knows what else pounded into the clay with his tennis-shoe-clad foot. Over these impressions, Soldner lays washes of color and, in repeated firings, salt, copper, fuel oil, and other substances placed directly against the works in the kiln. Many pieces are scorched with a blowtorch after and between firings. Images and colors obscure and reveal each other in counterbalance with negative smoked areas, creating seemingly infinite combinations of decorative reality.

The spontaneity of his method demands a controlled instinct. It also requires careful editing of the results, which has seemed lacking in some previous exhibitions. Happily, that is not the case here. Each work serves to show the freedom and freshness resulting when the process of one's art has become second nature and the aesthetic can stand unfettered. His use of the female nude and profile, animal forms, and referential landscape as figurative imagery, in the context of such "masculine" clay handling, implies the quest to combine our masculine and feminine energies—with success and eloquence.

The underlying quality of Soldner's work, however, is his respect for and receptivity to the clay itself. This is most apparent in the pedestal pieces. The dynamic drape and rigidity of slab clay is enhanced in its struggle against gravity within the classic vessel form. His willingness to violate accepted clayworking procedures has led to further innovations as well. One of the wall pieces, for example, shows how Soldner develops and incorporates process into his formal vocabulary. The piece has a large crack down the center, and he was apparently moved to try pouring hot lead over it to see if that would fuse the two parts visually. This was not totally successful. However, I then noticed poured lead on some other pieces—one a very successful patching of a base, the others using lead as decoration. Each of Soldner's seemingly random techniques is born of practicality, and his gift as an artist is the ability to incorporate such accidents into his aesthetic.

It is easy for us in ceramics to take the contributions of a Soldner for granted, as his innovations have become standard procedure for so many ceramists. We gain perspective on ourselves when we see the work of one of the few ceramists old enough to be considered a mature artist by art-world standards. This should remind us that the growth and development of American ceramics has been explosive (we have not even fully absorbed what we've witnessed so far), with the best probably yet to come. It is the integrity and dedication of artists like Soldner that have sustained us up to this point.

The work discussed here was seen at Marcia Rodell Gallery, Los Angeles (November 15–December 13, 1981). Ceramics by Soldner will also be shown at The Elements, New York (April 13–May 1, 1982), Craft Alliance Gallery, St. Louis (May 2–June 2), and at Objects Gallery, San Antonio, Texas (July 16–August 31, 1982).

Joanne Burstein is a ceramic sculptor represented by Anna Gardner Gallery and a freelance art critic.

Pedestal Piece *(1981), 14½" (36.8 cm) high, low-fired clay. Courtesy Marcia Rodell Gallery.*

Tee & Square *(1981), 30″ (76.2 cm) high, clay and wood. Courtesy Braunstein Gallery. Photo: Schopplein Studio.*

Tony Costanzo

Judith Dunham

Diverging considerably from the irreverent parody, figurative imagery, and sly humor that give California ceramics its prevailing identity, Tony Costanzo's work is more concerned with ideas peculiar to painting and sculpture than with those of contemporary clay. Exploiting a distinctive attribute of the material, Costanzo uses clay for the way it can simultaneously emphasize painterly surface and sculptural form.

Sculptural only by virtue of their implied mass and their cast shadows, the pieces are eggshell-thin sheets of slip tinted with pastel hues. In past work, a pattern of highlighted punctures embellished the surface, creating a uniform, if sometimes monotonous, visual rhythm. Hung on the wall, these works were noticeably similar to formalist painting.

Although Costanzo's work has not changed radically since his last solo show in San Francisco (1978), it has evolved to the extent that the tablets are more architectural in allusion, less infatuated with the fashionable aspects of formalism, and are measurably stronger for that growth. The artist's command of craft, though still significant, likewise plays a less prominent role.

New allusions are asserted: wallboard falling apart to expose wooden laths, fragments of painted stucco, chunks of deteriorating plaster walls. Costanzo never forgoes his earlier, restrained elegance, however, but manages to convey these impressions without making the pieces look literally and artificially worn by time. In a paradox of process and effect, they appear strong and sturdy, despite their actual fragility.

The architectural quality of the works is imparted primarily by revealing an element once hidden—the slender wood struts that support the reliefs and hold them slightly away from the wall. Now revealed and conspicuous—as framelike devices, or in evenly spaced rows imitating construction laths—the supports are integral to the works, endowing them with meaning beyond their carefully conceived, formal resolution.

Yet emphasis is placed as much on surface painting and nuance as it is on the vestiges of architectonic form. As if having absorbed washes of pastel color the way paper soaks up brushings of liquid pigment, the thin tablets of hardened slip look not so much painted as imbued with color. Light appears to emanate from their surfaces, creating a mood dependent upon the pale, intense color that dominates each piece. If Costanzo's palette has a source, it seems to be the ubiquitous California bungalows whose stucco walls are drenched in Easter-egg hues and baked in the sun. But where Costanzo's fields of uniform color threaten to become irritatingly saccharine, he tears edges on some tablets to expose raw areas of clay, tears random holes or linear openings (familiar from earlier work, but now in no predictable pattern) that punctuate the surface, and, in one example, stretches the still malleable clay to produce a distorted grid covering the entire surface.

Any tension between painting and sculpture that could have arisen in these works is resolved in favor of a subdued harmony of surface, texture, and form. There is, however, an odd underlying tension between an expressiveness struggling to speak out and a controlled refinement that seeks to dominate it. That same urge toward refinement, perhaps in addition to the physical limitations of the medium, prevents the overall size of these pieces from expanding beyond their present format—a move they currently seem to anticipate. Yet for Costanzo's imagery to be as engagingly allusive as it is, he must allow randomness, or the appearance of it, to disturb the order obviously fundamental to his sensibility. Now that Costanzo has come this far, the sense of restraint, which seems to be an inhibiting attitude rather than the aesthetic hallmark it may once have been, shows signs of loosening—all for the better.

Tony Costanzo's recent ceramic sculptures were seen at Braunstein Gallery, San Francisco (December 1-31, 1981).

Judith Dunham, a writer living in San Francisco, is associate director of the World Print Council. She is currently cowriting a book on Bay Area art, funded by an Art Critic's Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

David Middlebrook

Janet Koplos

David Middlebrook has made a habit of mocking assumptions. He continues to do so in his new work, which upends our expectations about scale in clay. While the earlier surreal objects surprised through trompe-l'oeil surfaces, the new surfaces seem restrained, almost traditional. The humor is less exhuberant, too, restricted to a couple of punning titles, but he continues to use clay without regard for its earthy nature.

Middlebrook is heading in a new direction. At first sight, the many large-scale pieces hold out a promise of great excitement. Most don't hold up under scrutiny, however, as their interest expires. Middlebrook is after something, but hasn't quite got it yet. This lack of resolution has two causes: the curious fact that these pieces are three dimensional yet are not sculpture, and the disharmony of surface and form.

A sculptural object is conceived three dimensionally and interacts with space, while most of Middlebrook's objects are not conceived in the round. Where a rectangle is wedged into a more free-form shape in *Intersection,* for example, there's real force when these two meet. But this energy is felt only when viewed head on, as the work consists of a front and a back plane joined by an indifferent, undecorated edge. Like many of the objects here, *Intersection* is a beefed-up cartoon cutout, which holds no interest when viewed from the side.

Neither sculptural volume nor relief, it is also without pottery's volume. Unlike Toshiko Takaezu's objects, for example, which seem to be created by an inner, swelling force, Middlebrook's *Son of a Cube,* to take another example, is a flat, static form containing none of that inner life. A series of planes that happen to be assembled in three dimensions, it sits heavily and does not interact with the space around it.

The same is true of two large tubular cubes, four and five feet tall, called *Four by 4* and *Tubic Space.* They are assembled much like terra-cotta plumbing pipes or PVC pipe furniture. One thinks immediately of Sol LeWitt's cubes, but LeWitt's hundreds of variations on that form usually omit some connecting part or parts, which the viewer then supplies in the imagination—thereby being drawn into participation with the work. Middlebrook's cubes, on the other hand, are complete and without challenge. Only one cube begins to intrigue—*Bengal* (the freehand pencil drawing around the framework resembles the fur of the tiger, as well as the pattern of wood grain). The lines create a wonderful graphic surface of flow and interruption, which draws one to follow their movement. The cube, like a puzzle, can be seen as having no end. The effect is not one of release, but containment, as the flowing pencil lines race to defy the static regularity of their cagelike cube.

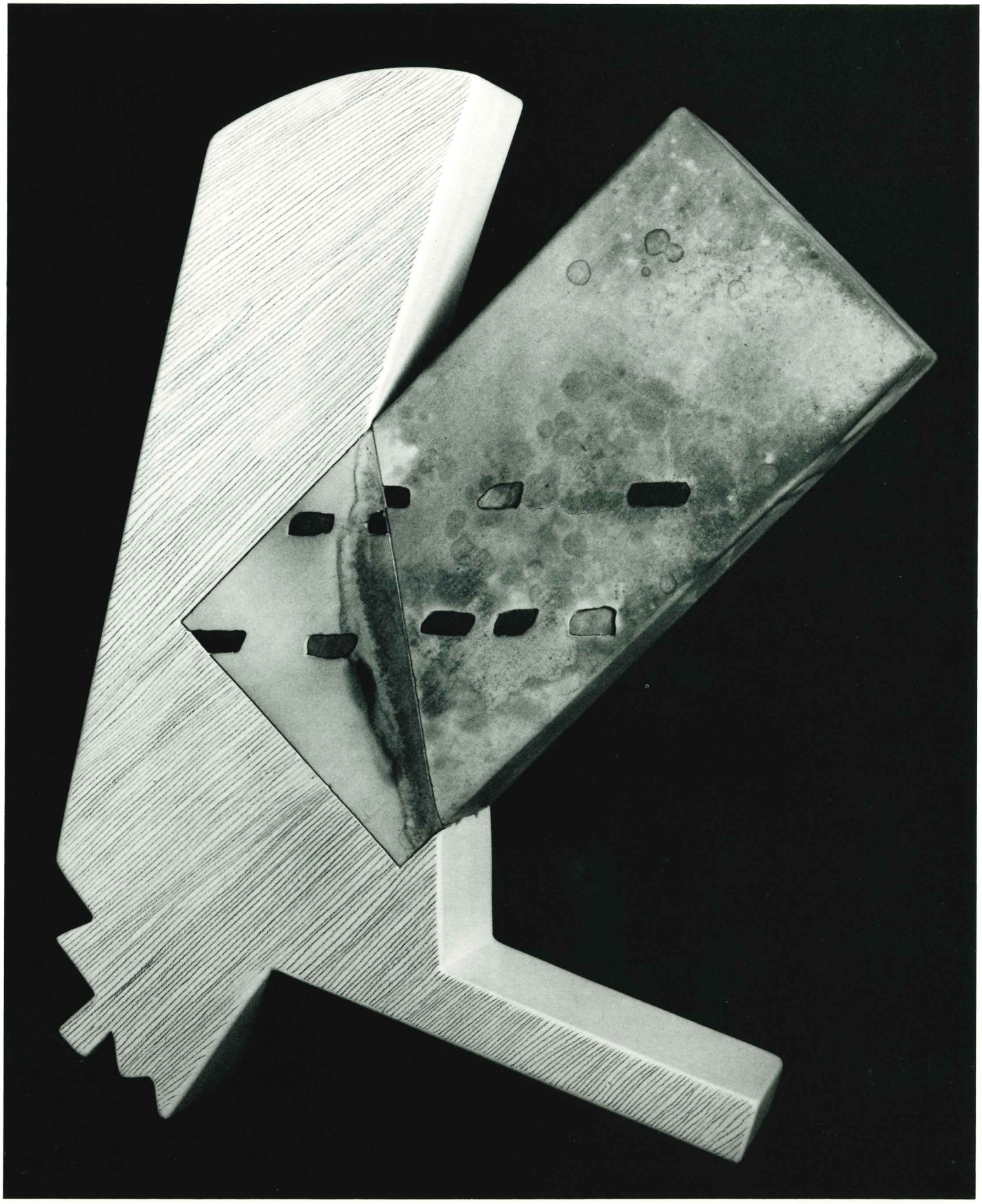
Color is present everywhere; not a single object in the show is totally uncolored or totally one-colored. Most elements are cut apart and reassembled, so color is discontinuous. They're mottled, subtle, earth-hued. There are suggestions of Southwestern landscapes and of Abstract Expressionist painting. A misty quality gives them an illusion of depth, and gives their surfaces an indeterminable, intangible quality. Though often lovely in effect, the soft organic character of this color is quite at odds with the constructed, geometric, and perhaps cartoony nature of the forms. So what is going on here? Middlebrook is combining manmade shapes and smooth industrial surfaces with moody, evocative color. Perhaps the key lies in his attitude toward construction. In that regard, *Core Sample* may be seen as a theme piece. It's an exciting one anyway. At sixteen feet in length, it is easily the largest, and it is also among the most emphatic. As it leans from high on the wall out onto the gallery floor, it punctuates the space. It has presence, and can't be ignored. While *Core Sample*'s bands of variously colored clays refer specifically to the earth, they may also metaphorically refer to the artist's exploration of form and surface.

This recent body of work grew from a stay in Australia in 1980, and a seminal piece called *Blue Chip,* which is a wall plate on which a section of plumbing pipe, an elbow joint, was formed in clay. The title refers to a fragment of blue tile applied to the surface. A rift splits the plate into unequal quadrants; one part is smooth, the rest is pitted and pink and gray in color. Ambiguous, spontaneous, and much less controlled than the pieces that followed it, *Blue Chip* is open enough to allow the imagination free play. In the later pieces, Middlebrook seems to have constricted the concept rather than expanded it. I think he needs to look back to the source of his inspiration.

The work reviewed here was on view at Klein Gallery, Chicago (December 4–January 6, 1982). Middlebrook's recent forms were also shown at Rochester Art Center, Minnesota (March 6–April 18, 1982).

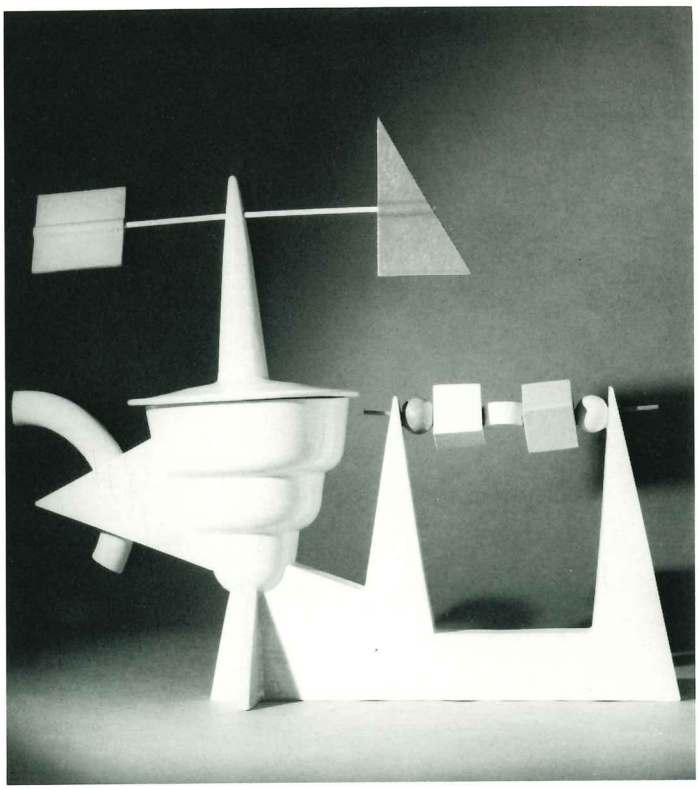
Janet Koplos is crafts editor for the New Art Examiner.

Intersection *(1981), 33" (84 cm) high, low-fired clay. Courtesy Klein Gallery.*



Peter Shire

Joanne Burstein



The carnival color and contrary constructivism of Peter Shire's ceramics have an amusing accessibility that is unsettling. They exhibit more ingenuity than craftsmanship, more irony than passion, more rapport with ceramics' mass-production heritage than love of clay. If Post-Modernism has any meaning to the field, Peter Shire is its standard-bearer. His new teapots and fabricated furniture at Janus Gallery are a cacophony of motion, color, and arrogance—ambitious fun!

The teapots are his trademark combinations of geometric and fantastic shapes from a child's nursery, copper tubing, concrete-reinforcement bars from the construction industry. He swears they are functional, though they are perversely constructed to belie that fact. Like these teapots, the four full-scale (ten feet high) *cabini* (referential beach cabanas) have an absurd functionality. They are made of plywood and other common construction materials, including the normally repellent corrugated plastic we love to hate, which crowns each *cabini* with mystery and light.

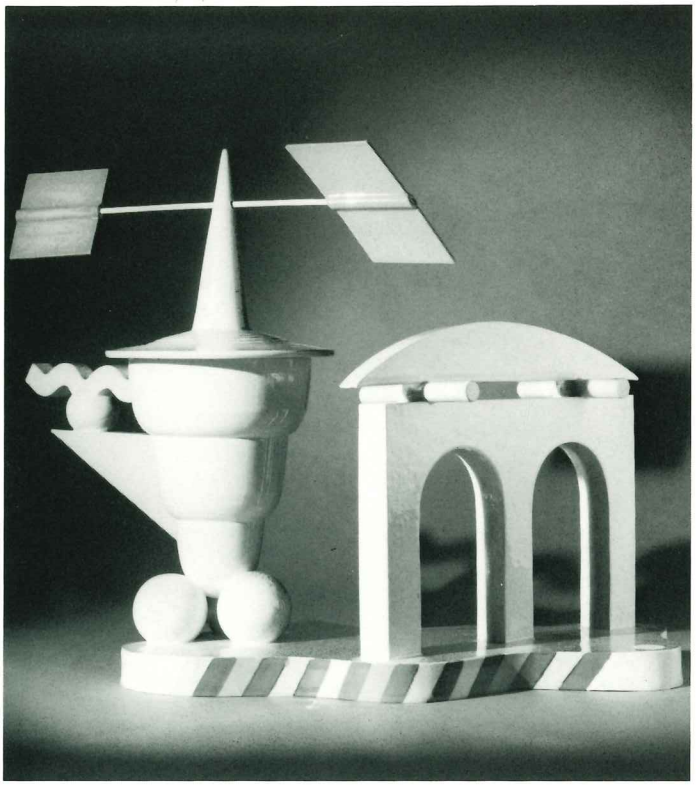
Shire's intrigue with the mass-production aspects of ceramics has led him to work with small factories in Italy. There, as well as in his Los Angeles studio, he has sought to create a designer vocabulary that could reproduce itself in his absence. Instead of fighting the onus of designer-ceramics, he surrenders to it. He does not resist the embrace of the mass market, he waits impatiently for it to enfold him—much as Andy Warhol did in the sixties. While other ceramists continue to develop a unique stance only they have the skill to execute, Shire has moved into other areas of functionality.

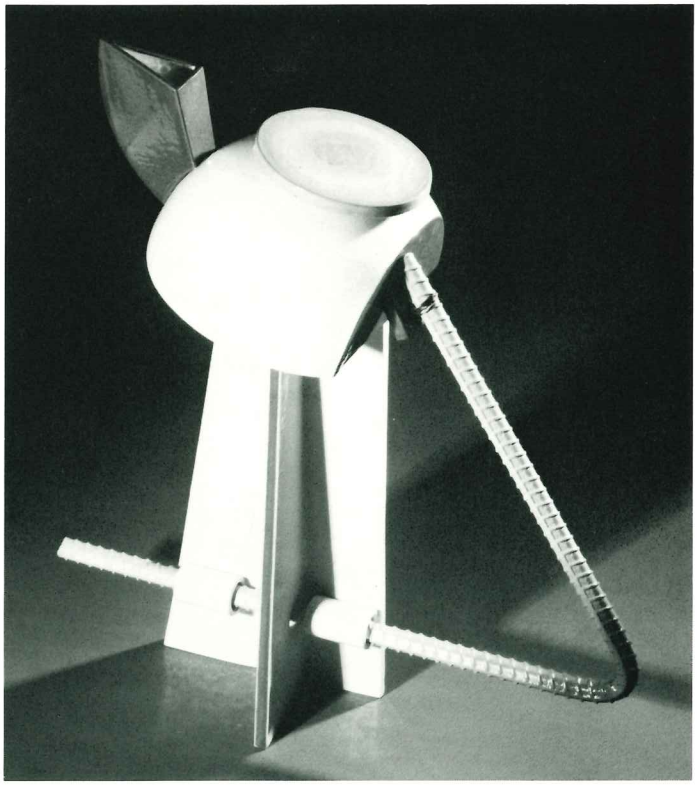
Completing the repertoire, Shire exhibited four pieces of furniture fabricated to his specifications. The three dressers and table combine antique slabs of marble, copper sheeting, natural woods, and brightly painted turned columns and baubles. Shire is taking his clue from the art world, where everyone from the Surrealists to the Minimalists has made art furniture. And this furniture is exquisite, every detail finely crafted, yet the bizarre juxtapositions of materials and forms save it from preciousness.

The central issue in Shire's work *is* functionality. The teapot, like the dresser drawers, are archetypes of function—function as a game. It should be fun, and the most fun comes from these objects looking as though they won't work when they do. It is a kind of irony still unfamiliar in the ceramics field. To underscore this attitude, many of the teapots are mounted on pedestals with a turntable top; ingenious, motor-driven devices turn the ceramic pieces while you stand quite stationary.

Shire's power is the power of invention. Clay is a material, not unlike plywood; it can be cut and built, assembled in any configuration, molded into any form. He puts many of the same elements together, over and over again, making duplicates or custom pieces at will. In fact, simultaneous to his show at Janus, he was included in Garth Clark's exhibit of contemporary "Art Deco Ceramics." His four identical teapots, glazed in different color combinations, appeared in context with stylistically Deco tableware by Adrian Saxe, Elsa Rady, Mineo Mizuno, Jim Caswell, Dorothy Hafner, and Judith Solomon. In the material reality of production method, he was the only true "deco" artist there—creating crafted functionality in the spirit of the Machine Age.

Shire's success in clay is based on an understanding of contemporary architectural principles and spatial relationships.





He understands when to fabricate and be unique, how to repeat and recombine from a set vocabulary. Whether using two-by-fours and plywood sheets or clay cubes, spheres, and disks, he alternately complies with and violates the "building code" to surprise and delight. Like the Post-Modernist architects, he draws shapes out of context and puts decoration where least expected.

Peter Shire is an artist of his time. Without buckling under to those demons of mass production and theatricalism, he extracts their essence with a strong sense of irony and keeps his integrity intact.

Ceramics and furniture by Peter Shire were shown at Janus Gallery, Los Angeles (December 4–31, 1981); his work may be seen in May and June of this year at Robin Cronin Gallery, Houston, and DBR Gallery, Cleveland; then in July and August at Morgan Gallery, Shawnee Mission, Kansas.

Joanne Burstein is a ceramic sculptor and art critic living in the Bay Area, who frequently contributes to Artweek *and* Images and Issues.

Rebar Balance Teapot *(1981), 13½" (34.3 cm) high, earthenware. Photo: Gerry Cappel.*

Weathervane Teapot *(1981), 12¾" (32.4 cm) high, earthenware. Photo: Gerry Cappel.*

Tableau Teapot *(1981), 14½" (36.8 cm) high, earthenware. Photo: Gerry Cappel.*

Tower Rebar Teapot *(1981), 16" (40.6 cm) high, earthenware, Courtesy Janus Gallery. Photo: Douglas Parker.*

Vessel *(1980), 7½" x 8½" x 6" (19 x 21.6 x 15.2 cm), burnished earthenware. Courtesy Helen Drutt Gallery.*

Robert Forman

Sid Sachs

The vessels of Robert Forman are deceptively spare; they seem more like commercial production pottery than unique, wheel-thrown vessels. In fact, with their matte black interiors and their sleek, flat, almost minimal exteriors, there is more than a passing resemblance between Forman's pots and an industrially made smoking pipe. If they were actually that plain, their description would probably end here.

One might think that ceramics so stark would convey a simple gestalt, like Minimal Art, and be perceived quickly. This, however, was one of the fallacies of Minimalism; nothing is understood by the mind simultaneously with the perception of the object. Even if Forman were producing ceramic *cubes,* our mind would still intervene with a running critique determined by our cultural and psychological history. Furthermore, Forman's vessels are, though simplified, not merely thrown cylindrical forms, but sophisticated distortions of ideal shapes. If one first thinks of them as commercial products, longer viewing reveals their subtle handmade qualities.

Forman throws his black earthenware vessels, then distorts their shape. His earlier ceramics are low-lying elongated bowls; the recent offerings seen here have higher walls, though Forman has shaped their rims so as to obliterate the dichotomy of inside-outside. That is, as one's eyes travel along the top of the vessel, the rim often dips down, so that one is now looking into the bowl instead of outside it. Forman is thus drawing with the edge of his forms. He then bisque fires the pots and burnishes a colored slip onto their outer surface. The color of this coating ranges from black, chestnut, and red, through a creamy gray. Although this surface looks commercially slick, close inspection reveals it to be composed of innumerable, small burnished planes.

One's expectations of what comprises a successfully thrown pot are also frustrated by Forman. Instead of a classically thin-walled vessel, Forman's ceramics are about an inch thick. Given that these vessels are not really very large (the one pictured here measures seven and one-half inches high), this makes the scale of these moderate-sized bowls fairly massive, and gives them an athletic, energetic presence. This brawniness, coupled with pure and simple colors, causes Forman's vessels to spring to life in this small white gallery space.

Such aggressiveness may also be a function of Forman's sculptural abilities; for as he distorts the wheel-thrown clay, the forms tend to rise up from their bases. The forms themselves (though not the colors) are fairly flowing, almost biomorphic. They seem to be stretching their muscles and, being asymmetric, in a state of constant flux. It seems obvious that Forman is striving for this contradiction: traditional vessel against nonclassic thickness; slick but elegant tone resembling Danish modern design against a multitude of handmade surfaces; quickly perceived gestalt against the flowing, ever so slightly modulated format. In fact, a studio photograph showing Forman with his vessels reveals several drawings of bowls on the wall, along with such notations as "Bolder form" and the symbol for Yin-Yang.

Still in his mid-thirties, Robert Forman has perhaps reached a crossroads in his development. He can become more austere, producing ever more similar products that deviate only slightly from a self-imposed norm, and with more monochromatic surfaces. Or, on the other hand, he can become more gestural and graphic in both his distortions and in the drawing of his edges; perhaps go even further along to the high-tech texture. Just as Minimalism has lost much of its steam—even its most rigorous proponents, such as Mel Bochner and Sol LeWitt, have been expanding their oeuvre to include pseudo-narrative photographs and/or bright primary color—so Forman will have to soon choose among his aesthetic paths, or seem like he is hedging his bets. This is not to point a finger at Forman; it's just that the timbre of our times makes such reevaluation seem necessary.

Robert Forman's vessels were shown at Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia (November 10–December 5, 1981).

Sid Sachs is a painter and critic, and a regular contributor to the New Art Examiner.

Untitled *(1981), 10¼" (26 cm) high, porcelain. Courtesy The Elements. Photo: Bob Hanson.*

Tom Spleth

Casper G. Schmidt

Tom Spleth has worked in most of the various techniques and types of pottery, but he now consciously limits himself to slip-cast porcelain. He uses a pure white body, high-fired to complete vitreousness, which he decorates with brushwork under a clear, glossy glaze. Walking through the show, one is struck by the predominance of simple cylinders and bowls of various sizes, except for a small number of more adventurous (though not always successful) shapes.

By its very nature, slip casting can produce rather dull, lifeless forms, since most spontaneous irregularities get cleaned up in the process. Often slip casting leads to a kind of mechanical beauty, rather than the vibrant sensuality of a handthrown pot. However, when this limitation is overcome, some extraordinary results may be had: many of the best Art Nouveau and Art Deco pots were made in this way. And one has only to look at what China's Shang dynasty managed to cast from molds to perceive the further reaches of this technique.

In and of themselves, Spleth's cylinders are very unsatisfactory to me; they have neither the studied casualness of Lea Embree's porcelain cylinders, nor the high-strung formal tensions of those of Harlan House. They hover uncertainly between these possibilities, and though a flaring mouth occasionally adds a livelier touch, my breath was not taken away. The bowls are similarly uninspired, with walls that look as if they have been barely saved from slumping, and flat feet. Function in these pots is vestigial, though even in this aspect they are ambiguous—not sturdy enough to invite vigorous use, not ethereal enough to be merely objects of wonderment (as are the teapots of Phillip Cornelius). An incidental aside: Spleth's pots, especially the bowls, when hit with the finger, have the most beautiful and resonant ping.

Though I have little praise for the forms, when it comes to the decoration and glazing, I frankly despair. Over everything Spleth has applied a dreadfully glossy glaze, which, had it been slightly softened to a duller finish, would have added a world of subtlety. The interiors of the larger cylinders are speckled with blotches of maroon glaze. Peering into these cylinders is a bit like looking into a diseased throat. Other cylinders are spotted with only a tinge of redness or not at all, which is much more effective.

The most striking, and troublesome, element of Spleth's pottery is his brushwork, which covers virtually all the pots in an unrelenting painter's fury. We do not really have in the West a tradition of beautiful brushwork. Indeed, in comparison to the potters of Islam and the Far East, virtually the entire history of Western brush decoration on ceramics is one of unremitting ugliness. Possible exceptions are the Greeks, some of their Cretan predecessors, and, more recently, Miró.

I have found no better standard of excellence for brushwork than the following phrase from the Chinese: *yu pi yu mo* (to have brush, to have ink).[1] I take this to mean that each individual brush stroke should have "brush" (an invisible skeleton to support the form of the stroke) and "ink" (a sensual or emotional quality, an evocativeness to distinguish it from the flat monochrome black of printing). Spleth's painting has neither "brush" nor "ink." His pots are covered with numberless strokes, without a sustaining substructure, and with colors that become, presented this way, a murky film covering the brightness of the porcelain. At times a thin, vaguely sinuous sgraffito line is used on top of the brushwork to no appreciable effect; it neither accentuates the form of the underlying stroke, nor imposes a secondary rhythm on top of it.

The piece shown here is excellent, however—a cylinder that is clear-glazed in his usual manner. Beneath the glaze are the mildest, even whimsical brown brush squiggles. Over the thickest applications of this iron-oxide slip, the glaze has crawled, leaving interesting patches of matte brown. The amount of squiggles, their emphasis, and their placement—all just right and what a delight! The precursors to which this pot should properly be compared are some Tz'u Chou wares of the Sung period, where little blobs of brown were applied over the glaze, or the Ch'ing-pai celadons, in which iron was also splashed over the glaze. This cylinder can take its place next to these examples from the past. But it goes beyond that to become a truly contemporary piece. And it is this aspect—this double-pronged articulation of both modern American and Far Eastern traditions—that makes it an important pot, rather than one that is merely good.

1. Mai-mai Sze, ed. and trans., *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting,* Bollingen Series (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 29.

Ceramics by Tom Spleth were on view at The Elements, New York (November 3-21, 1981).

Casper G. Schmidt is a potter with a studio in New York City.

Andrew Lord

Michael McTwigan

Art galleries have begun to give contemporary ceramics a chance to prove itself in the marketplace. Art critics, too, now occasionally give it the nod, as they try to make sense of it for a largely uninitiated art public. Those who know ceramics well are gratified by the attention of these new admirers, if sometimes annoyed by their inexperience. A recent exhibition in New York illustrates the very real danger of misinterpretation.

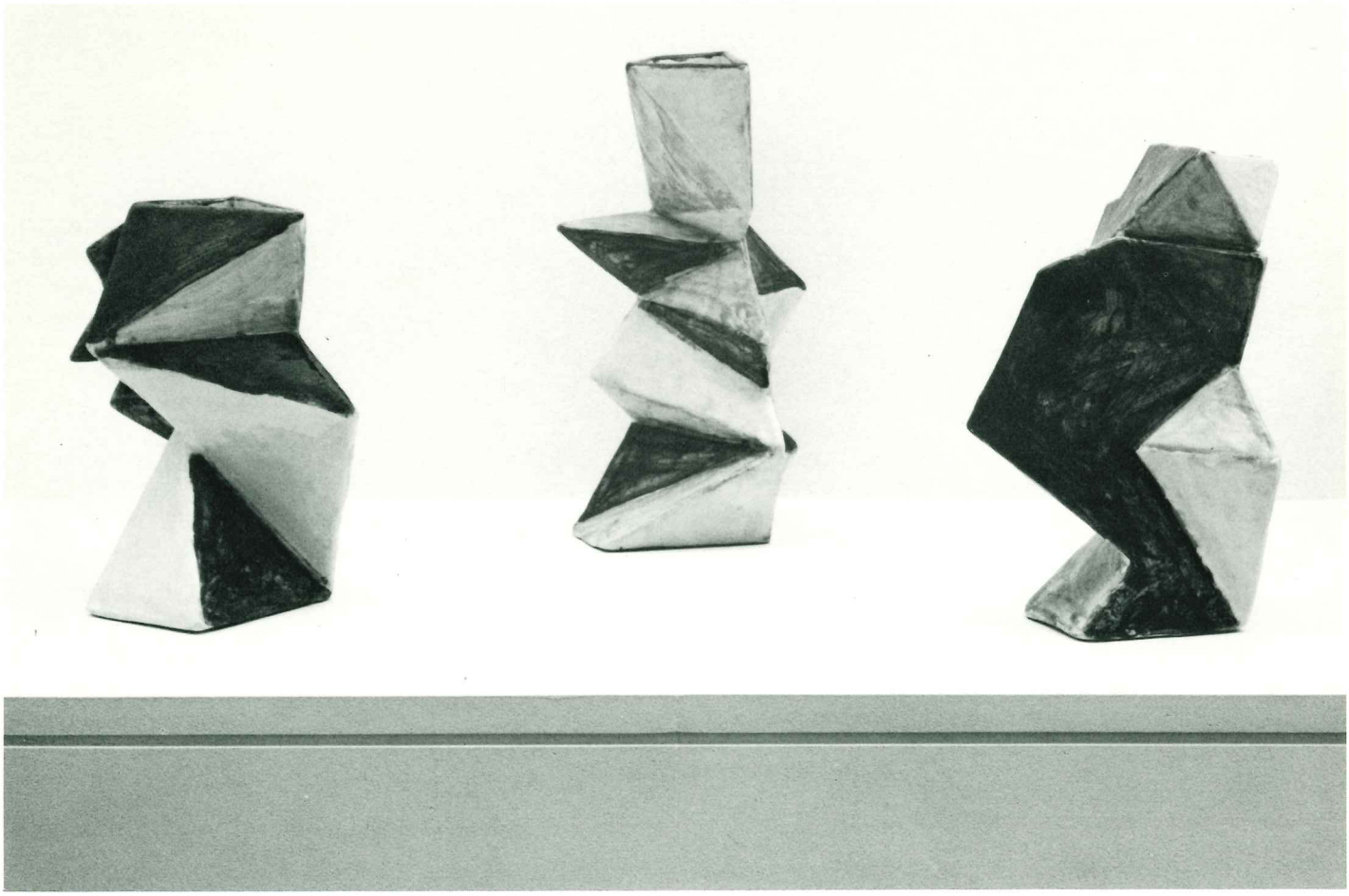
"The most original show of the month," says one New York critic.[1] "One of the best shows of the year," says another.[2] The subject? English artist Andrew Lord, age 30, whose ceramic tea services, coffee pots, pitchers, cups, and jars seemingly cast a spell on all who behold them. So what's the fuss about? Let's listen:

Lord outlines, fills in, dabs, brushes, and dapples his paint/glaze in a freewheeling manner which is just short of slapdash. The work is consistent in its animated asymmetrical jangle; the pots don't sit squarely on their shelves, the forms don't sit squarely with each other; the paint doesn't sit squarely on the forms. This lack of alignment seems very unusual for ceramics and makes the work seem poised, ready for action.[3]

If the time was 1954 and the place was California, these critics might be on to something. Unfortunately, Peter Voulkos, John Mason, Rudy Autio, Malcolm McClain, Billy Al Bengston (why go on?) have all been here ahead of Mr. Lord. In the late fifties, it was necessary to show that a pot need not be symmetrical and perfectly centered. What *is* remarkable is that clay artists today are still tilting at windmills demolished long ago by Voulkos and his followers.

Lord's pots are purposely ugly; their features include incorrect proportions, clumsy handles, and ungainly feet. Their forms are nearer to a child's drawing of pottery than to the classical ceramics they mock. Perhaps the most clumsy are his plates, which resemble unbaked pizza crust. If there was any deliberate humor in the work, one might gratefully conclude that he is a late-blooming apostle of Funk. But Lord is deadly earnest. He seems to have mastered with Lewis Carroll's Gryphon the grim branches of Arithmetic: Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision.

The other facet of Andrew Lord's oeuvre comprises the same pots—pitchers, jars, coffee pots—seen through Cubist spectacles. Like the Cubists, he depicts this vision on contrasting geometric planes that seem to comply with, but actually confound, our expectations of light and shade. His titles are an aid to the uninitiated: *The Two Teapots in Morning Light/Angled/Grey* or *The Chinese Jar in the Afternoon/Angled/Shaded/Colored,* for example.



Which leads me to the "real" subject of Lord's work (so gallery representatives took care to explain)—paint and light. He brushes his glaze on thickly; the result resembles paint with a shine. The painting itself, however, seems arbitrary, to no purpose, and is as awkwardly composed as the forms. The alternating rhythms of dark and light found on the geometric forms are more appealing. Here we can at least play at guessing what is near and what is far, while our eyes follow one dazzling highlight to another. The brilliance of the gallery's spotlights certainly aided Lord in his light-and-shade game; I suspect these would look rather dull in the light of day. They certainly would in the light of a little history.

Of the dozens of works shown, the few slate gray pieces were the most successful. The dark matte color deadens their surfaces, revealing clearly their geometric form while giving them an unreal, specterlike presence. Because the dull surfaces look more like lead than clay, the forms can be appreciated for themselves, and not as some kind of disfigured ceramic.

1. John Russell, "Art: Household Objects Don Mysterious Guises," *The New York Times,* December 18, 1981.
2. Roberta Smith, "Simple Pleasures," *The Village Voice,* December 16-22, 1981.
3. Ibid.

Ceramics by Andrew Lord were exhibited at Blum Helman Gallery, New York (December 8, 1981–January 16, 1982), and at Carol Taylor, Dallas (March 6–April 1, 1982).

(Detail) Late Afternoon Set *(1978), glazed earthenware. Courtesy Blum Helman Gallery. Photo: David Lubarsky.*

(Detail) Electric Light *(1980), glazed earthenware. Courtesy Blum Helman Gallery. Photo: David Lubarsky.*

Geometric Basket *(1981), 20½" (52 cm) high. Photo: Roger Schreiber.*

Anne Hirondelle

Louise Klemperer

Stately vessels like tree trunks with extended arches; chunky spheres juggling pieced-together slabs overhead and sending energy off at crazy angles: Anne Hirondelle's raku pottery at Northwest Craft Center was the culmination of a year-and-a-half's exploration. One source for the works' energy is the series of polarities or tensions in many of the pieces. These tensions result from a skillful juxtaposing of pairs of opposites in combinations or quantities such that no single element of a pair dominates.

Hirondelle's ceramics are constructed of very simple elements: straight cylinders, cylinders that bulge at the top, spheres, half spheres, platters, and slabs. Flattened, thrown arches or pressed slabs are added to these basic forms. Usually the clay is a dark uniform gray, and black glaze, used sparingly, sometimes appears as gently flowing vertical lines or shapes, sometimes as more active diagonal splashes. Other design elements frequently encountered are incised lines and cut-out geometric shapes.

Confining herself to this limited visual vocabulary, Hirondelle achieves two very different qualities of expression, one formal, one spontaneous. The tension resulting from the presence of these opposing qualities on a single piece is the most pervasive, and most successful, polarity of the many contrasts here. For example, the spheres, half spheres, and cylinders bear flat, roughly cut or broken appendages, which stand in sharp contrast to the round symmetrical forms upon which they appear. In the *Totem* and the *Basket* series, on the other hand, more regular arcs or flanges, punctured with geometric holes, are added to tall, thrown cylinders. Here the element of contrast is due to the unpredictable placement of the holes and to the freely poured glaze, its patterns partly mimicking, partly contradicting other shapes present.

The next most evident polarity is that between a pot and its appendage. Hirondelle successfully avoids making her straight-laced, almost stiff vessels mere supports for their imaginative, unexpected additions; she also avoids making the vessels so dominant that their contrasting appendages would seem like an afterthought. The task of creating a unity between these elements is made more difficult by Hirondelle's refusal to distort the vessel. There are no Abstract-Expressionist dents, bumps, or swipes here.

Nevertheless, her pots are not torn apart by their opposing tendencies. While uniform color and the use of linear elements on both appendage and pot help reinforce their sense of wholeness, it is repetition that best serves to unify these works. In *Cylinder with Fin,* for example, applied and incised shapes on the fin echo the trailing pattern of the cylinder's glaze. On *Flag Basket,* a series of small circles are cut out of its flange and circles of the same size are stenciled in glaze across the surface of the cylinder.

A series of large thrown platters, upon which Hirondelle carefully outlined squares with poured lines of glaze, was the least successful effort of the show. There are no spontaneous elements to balance their controlled execution, and no other source of tension. The other two-dimensional works shown are more successful. The artist pressed thin, irregularly shaped pieces of clay onto rectangular clay plaques, then incised the clay with straight or curved lines that act like a skeletal structure for the applied shapes, lending a sense of order to an otherwise free-form terrain.

In the strongest pieces, the contrast of differing elements and the unexpected juxtapositions of accident and formality give the work an exciting tension. Hirondelle's use of glaze, line, simple vessel forms, and slab additions are all employed toward these startling polarities. The weakest pieces suffer from either lack of tension or from an ambiguity of context. A few pots can be equally read as contrived design exercises or as spontaneous and playful expressions. Such lack of clarity leaves the viewer unsettled. For the most part, however, the show was quite successful.

The work discussed here was shown at Northwest Craft Center, Seattle (July 3–31, 1981); related works were also exhibited at Franklin House Gallery, Port Townsend, Washington (August 7–31, 1981).

Louise Klemperer writes on art for Fresh Weekly, *and lives in Portland, Oregon.*

Books

The American Arts and Crafts

Joanne Polster

The Arts and Crafts in Detroit, 1906–1976: The Movement, the Society, the School. *Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1976. 296 pages. 6 color plates. 279 black-and-white illustrations.*

Chicago Ceramics and Glass: An Illustrated History from 1871 to 1933, *by Sharon S. Darling. Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1979. 221 pages. 1 color plate. 220 black-and-white illustrations. $25.00 (cloth).*

California Design 1910, *edited by Timothy J. Andersen, Eudorah M. Moore, Robert W. Winter. Pasadena: California Design Publications, 1974. 148 pages. 317 black-and-white illustrations. $11.95 (paper).*

Ode to Nature: Flowers and Landscapes of the Rookwood Pottery, 1880–1940, *by Kenneth R. Trapp. New York: Jordan-Volpe Gallery, 1980. Distributed by Peregrine Smith, Layton, Utah. 90 pages. 18 color plates. 12 black-and-white illustrations. $15.00 (paper).*

Fulper Art Pottery: An Aesthetic Appreciation, 1909–1929, *by Robert W. Blasberg with Carol L. Bohdan. New York: Jordan-Volpe Gallery, 1979 .Distributed by Peregrine Smith, Layton, Utah. 88 pages. 14 color plates. 76 black-and-white illustrations. $14.95 (paper).*

Grueby, *by Robert W. Blasberg. Syracuse: Everson Museum of Art, 1981. 32 pages. 5 color plates. 15 black-and-white illustrations. $8.00 (paper).*

The Biloxi Art Pottery of George Ohr, *by Garth Clark. Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1978. Unpaged. 36 color plates. 11 black-and-white illustrations.*

The Arts and Crafts Ideal: The Ward House, an Architect and His Craftsmen, *by Cleota Reed Gabriel. Syracuse: The Institute for Development of Evolutive Architecture, 1978. 51 pages. 2 color plates. 45 black-and-white illustrations.*

The Roycroft Movement: A Spirit for Today? *Buffalo: State University of New York College at Buffalo, Burchfield Art Center, 1977. Tabloid. 16 pages. 35 black-and-white illustrations.*

In the years that have elapsed since the Princeton Art Museum's "Arts and Crafts Movement in America" recognized the regional character of the Arts and Crafts Movement, there have been several exhibitions focusing on this theme.

The Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts (recently renamed the Center for Creative Studies—College of Art and Design) is the subject of an excellent catalogue documenting the history of the society and its influence on the cultural life of the city. **The Arts and Crafts in Detroit, 1906–1976,** presented at the Detroit Institute of Arts, celebrates the society's seventieth anniversary. Founded by a group of Anglophiles imbued with the William Morris ideal that "art could exercise a moral function in daily life," the society saw itself as "part of an international effort to encourage good and beautiful work as applied to useful service." Led at its inception by such figures as George G. Booth, publisher of the Detroit Free Press and founder of the Cranbrook Schools, and Mary Chase Perry, whose Pewabic Pottery became famous for its tiles and art pottery, the society initiated what later developed into the Little Theater Movement, inaugurated craft exhibitions, and established an art school. Its workrooms and galleries provided a beneficent climate for the interaction of architects, designers, and craftspeople, whose collaboration often resulted in integrated interior and exterior designs. Of special interest are the publication's chapters on "Arts and Crafts Architecture in Detroit" by Thomas Holleman, "The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Era 1906–1931" by Sheila Tabakoff, and "The Pewabic Pottery" by Thom Brunk. Profusely illustrated by black-and-white photographs with well-documented captions, this publication also includes a twenty-seven-page bibliography and a list of the society's major exhibitions.

Chicago's contributions to the Arts and Crafts Movement are explored in **Chicago Ceramics and Glass: An Illustrated History from 1871 to 1933** by Sharon Darling, the second in a series of exhibition publications on the city's architectural and decorative arts. It was published in conjunction with an exhibition by the Chicago Historical Society in 1979. Darling traces the development of Art Pottery in Chicago from its beginnings in decorative china painting to the clubs and classes that fostered the art and led not only to the growth of commercial china-painting studios, but also to the founding of such art potteries as Pauline Pottery and the Gates Potteries, producers of Teco ware. The cut and engraved art-glass industry and its production studios and workshops are also explored. Roughly half the publication's 221 pages is devoted to the development, design, and use of stained and ornamental glass and molded terra cotta in Chicago's architecture and interiors of the period. The glass studios that flourished during that time produced not only the traditional church and residential windows and panels, but also the new rectilinear style of art glass designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, then a young architect, for incorporation into his "low-slung, terrain-hugging 'Prairie Houses.'" The introduction of molded terra cotta as fireproofing material and as architectural decoration solved many problems for the burgeoning construction industry, whose main task was to rebuild the city after the Great Fire. Darling presents a detailed history of the four architectural terra cotta factories that fed this need. Darling has done more than simply present us with objects and researched information about them. She has placed them in a historical context, revealing a great deal about social and economic conditions.

In her introductory essay to **California Design 1910,** Eudorah Moore describes the Arts and Crafts Movement in the West: "[It] seemed to be expressed more as a value judgment and a lifestyle, and the embracing of the arts and crafts, an indispensible part of life, than the repetition of a single design vision. [It was affected by] the strangely palpable sense of space, of the land and the individual's identity with it . . . and the quality of Western light. . . . The benign climate brought an almost romantic consciousness of nature." To interpret the "forms and values of the Movement as they were influenced and changed by the nature and surroundings of California," the curators selected objects and illustrations and directed discussions of art, architecture, interiors, and art furnishings to reflect social and stylistic attitudes. "The integrated diversity of a creative vision" is amply presented by illustrations and essays on such artists and architects as Arthur and Lucia Mathews,[1] Charles and Henry Greene, George Harris, and Irving Gill. Of interest is the chapter on Art Pottery, which describes and illustrates the productions of lesser-known California potteries, whose ceramics more nearly reflect what is thought of as the Arts and Crafts style.

Art Pottery was produced by a variety of methods and in a diversity of styles. Although one tends to think of Grueby and its imitators as typical of the Arts and Craft ideal, there were in fact many

potteries producing a wide variety of artwares. While many may not merit full-scale exhibitions, either because of the artistic level of their production or because the number of pieces extant is not sufficient, there are a number that do warrant solo exhibitions.

Rookwood Pottery is no stranger to the exhibition scene, yet **Ode to Nature: Flowers and Landscapes of the Rookwood Pottery, 1880–1940** (Jordan-Volpe Gallery, New York, 1980) may be the first solo exhibition presented in recent times. Mounted in celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the pottery's founding, the gallery has published a handsome catalogue with an essay by Kenneth Trapp and full-color plates. Trapp, in addition to providing a history of the pottery, concentrates on its experimentation and introduction of new glazes to meet changing American tastes and the use of indigenous American flowers, plants, and landscapes, which gradually replaced the Japanese motifs so characteristic of its early products. The publication includes a bibliography of published and unpublished sources, a list of relevant magazines of the period, a list of public collections that contain Rookwood Pottery (those holding ten or more pieces), and a chronology of awards the pottery received.

The Fulper Pottery of Flemington, New Jersey, had received little recognition of its contribution to the Art Pottery Movement until the opening of another Jordan-Volpe Gallery exhibition in 1979, **Fulper Art Pottery: An Aesthetic Appreciation, 1909–1929.** Tracing the history and development of a pottery about which little has been written, Robert W. Blasberg and Carol L. Bohdan have made a valuable contribution to the literature. Their text describes Fulper's glaze experiments and treatments, often inspired by Oriental techniques, the reliance on vessel shapes and surface modeling to create interest, and the introduction of lamps and ceiling fixtures into regular production. The authors' chapter on identification includes photographs and dates of the Fulper marks and monograms. Fulper continued to produce its unique vases, lamps, bowls, and artware of all kinds until the death of its founder, William Hill Fulper, Jr. Well illustrated, this fine publication includes a bibliography and list of museum collections containing Fulper works.

The ceramics of William H. Grueby seem most representative of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The matte glazes, the substantial textured shapes and "chaste" modeling are natural accompaniments for the austerity of Mission furniture. The Everson Museum of Art's 1981 exhibition, **Grueby,** presents an illustrated essay in its catalogue by Robert W. Blasberg, which traces the history, development, and design content of Grueby's artware and decorative tiles.

George Ohr, the "mad potter of Biloxi," is the subject of **The Biloxi Art Pottery of George Ohr,** an exhibition presented by the Mississippi State Historical Museum in 1978. Garth Clark describes the art and antics of this exuberant eccentric, whose actions and attitudes seem so contemporary. Ohr's incredibly thin and delicate vessel forms, which he twisted, folded, wrinkled, ruffled, and dented, were a kind of "action" pottery. Glaze treatment was his primary source of decoration.

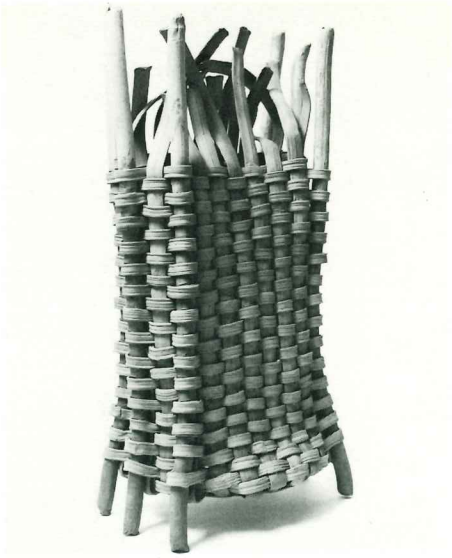
In 1978, the Institute for the Development of Evolutive Architecture of Syracuse, New York, published **The Arts and Crafts Ideal: The Ward House, an Architect and His Craftsmen.** This publication accompanied an exhibition organized by Cleota Reed Gabriel and provided the first public display of the work of New York architect Ward Wellington Ward (1875–1932). The catalogue is especially interesting for the collaboration it describes between Ward and Henry Keck, the stained-glass artist, and Henry Chapman Mercer, the founder of the Moravian Pottery and Tileworks, both of whom contributed to Ward's architectural works. This is a handsome catalogue with fine illustrations.

A small off-beat publication, titled **The Roycroft Movement: A Spirit for Today?,** was published in connection with an exhibition by the Burchfield Center of the State University of New York College at Buffalo in 1977. It describes the Roycroft Community of East Aurora, New York, founded as a community of artisans and students by businessman-publisher turned Utopian, Elbert Hubbard. He envisioned it as a place where artisans not only produced beautiful things, but more importantly, could train others to do so and instill in them a sense of beauty. The workshops produced metalwork, furniture, and other domestic furnishings. They also published and printed fine books in handsome bindings in the style of William Morris. Perhaps its most famous alumnus was papermaker Dard Hunter, who came to the community as a student in 1903 and stayed to become a regular member. Its roots are pure William Morris—perhaps more so in social consciousness than other offshoots of the American Arts and Crafts Movement—yet the Roycroft Community has received little attention. Although it survived the death in 1915 of Hubbard and his wife aboard the Lusitania by twenty-three years, the community was finally dissolved in 1938. Janice Crumrine, author of the catalogue's essay, asserts "The Roycroft Movement stands as one alternative for a new community form. Its integration of the individual with work and a total view of life serves as a beacon to many on a search similar to that of Elbert Hubbard." A memoir by Hubbard's daughter, photographs of the Roycroft Inn, and a bibliography add to one's understanding of the movement. Unfortunately, this publication was printed as a newsprint tabloid, which makes it extremely fragile.

1. See also: Harvey L. Jones, *Mathews: Masterpieces of the California Decorative Style* (Oakland: The Oakland Museum, 1972), 105 pages, 9 color plates, 53 black-and-white illustrations. $24.95 (cloth).

Joanne Polster is head librarian of the American Craft Council. With the aid of a Services to the Field grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, she is compiling a retrospective index of selected craft periodicals.

RINA PELEG



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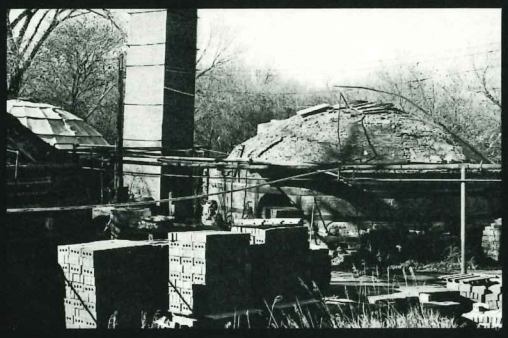

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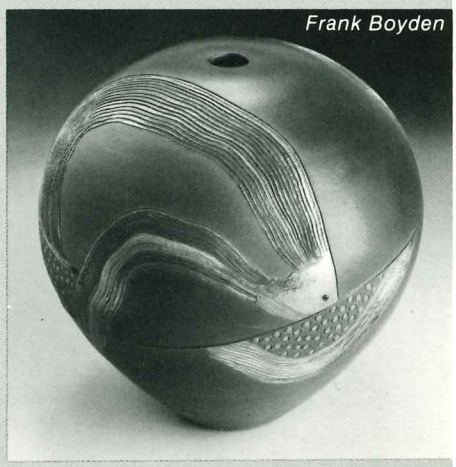
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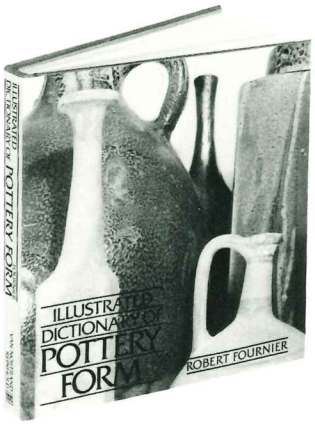

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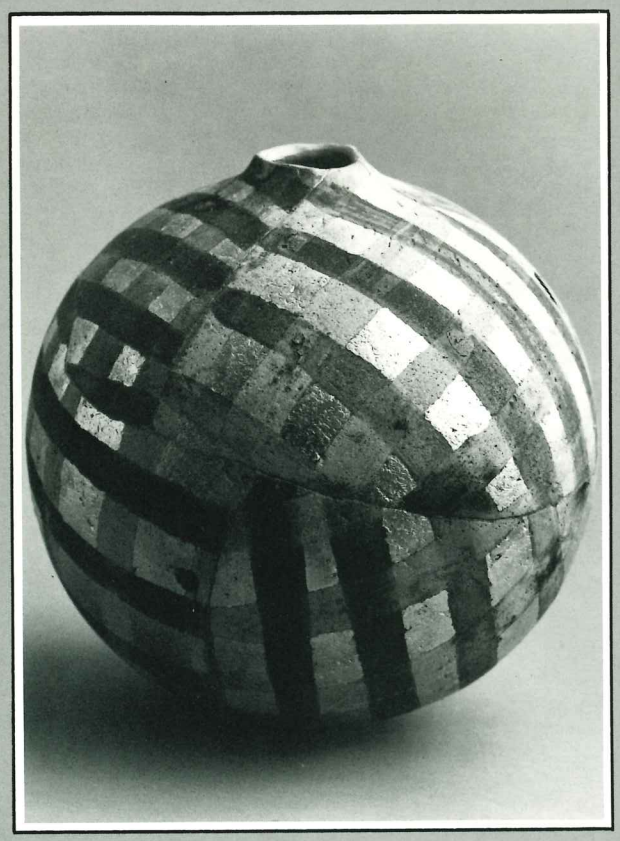

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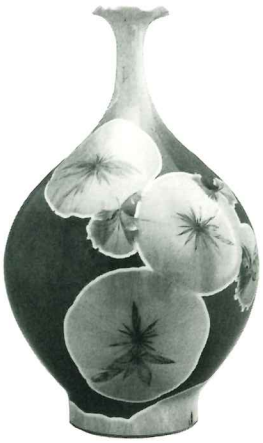

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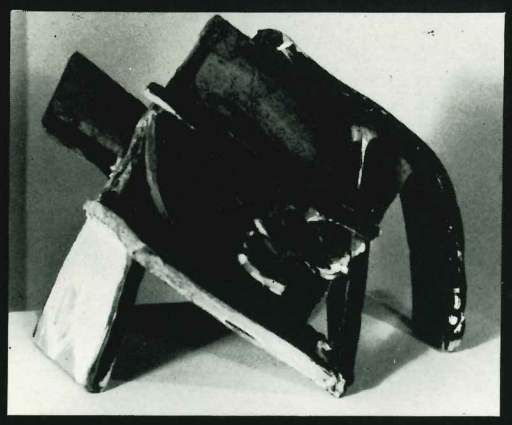

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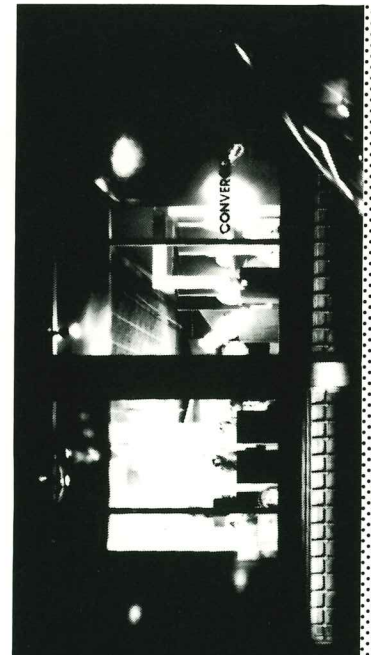

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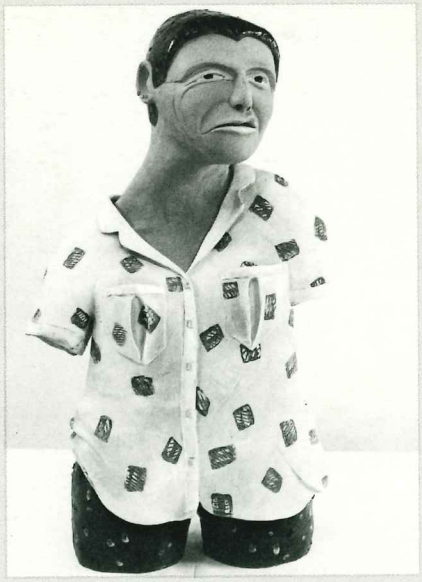

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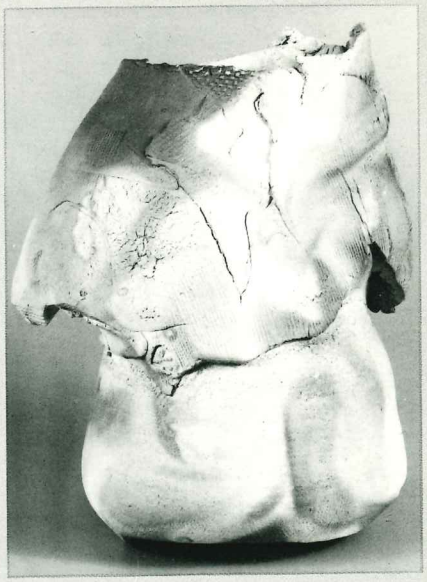

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